RADICAL EVANGELICALISM AND THE POOR: A CHALLENGE TO ASPECTS OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

by

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ABSTRACT

The general question addressed in this thesis is: What difference does a theology in which the poor are a central category make to the way in which evangelical theology is formulated? The thesis argues that radical evangelicalism is an identifiable movement within the evangelical community in which commitment to the poor is a primary characteristic. This commitment is expressed in a theological formulation which challenges ways in which evangelical theology, hermeneutic, and mission have traditionally been understood and practised.

In its opening chapter the thesis commences by identifying radical evangelicalism and then proceeds in chapter two to identify the poor, first in the light of the South African context, and second in the light of scripture. This foundation is followed by a section in which historical and theological developments of the central theme take place. A survey chapter reflects on radical evangelical perceptions concerning the poor. In the subsequent key chapter of the thesis, a theological formulation characterized by two fundamental statements is offered: a theology of the poor is one in which a preferential option for the poor is taken and is a theology "from the underside", that is arising mainly from third world contexts where the experience of oppression shapes theology. Following these developments, two major conclusions are drawn. First, as a contextual theology this formulation challenges traditional West-

ern evangelical methodology. Second, as a holistic theology of mission it challenges evangelical tendencies towards individualism and dualism.

In challenging traditional Western evangelical perceptions in these key areas this thesis proposes an alternative evangelical formulation. This formulation, which is in harmony particularly with the third world radical evangelical perceptions which focus on the poor and oppressed, shapes its theology from this perspective and affirms that the poor are a key category in determining theological understanding. This theological statement is made in the light of the present South African situation. It represents an attempt to reflect an essentially evangelical understanding freed from the perceived inadequacies of aspects of this tradition and relevant to the concerns of the South African context.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis represents my attempt as an evangelical to respond to the theological and socio-political challenges which I have encountered in a South African context. In so doing I offer a theological formulation which endeavours to be faithful to what I see as the best in the evangelical tradition. This formulation is used to challenge aspects of the conservative evangelical theology and practice in which I have been raised. These are perspectives which I have taught and defended until recently. In challenging these perspectives I am mindful of the positive aspects of the views under consideration and grateful for much of my experience within this tradition. Nevertheless, the critique of leading aspects of conservative evangelicalism within this thesis is prompted by first hand experience and research which has led me to the sometimes painful discovery of the inadequacy of some of the views I had previously taken for granted. In this thesis I attempt an alternative formulation to these perceived inadequacies. I trust that in some significant ways the formulations expressed here may contribute to the development of an alternative, liberating, and relevant evangelical theology. Such theological understanding, accompanied by holistic mission action, is I believe urgently needed by evangelicals if they are to be able to face the challenges confronting them in the present day South African situation.

I wish particularly to thank my supervisor Dr. Neville Richardson of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Natal, for his wise guidance and constant encouragement throughout this project. My thanks also to Mr. Patrick Maxwell of the same Department who introduced me to the intricacies of computer word processing and has been my constant mentor in this regard. My wife Shirley and daughter Megan have supported me unflinchingly in these years

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Unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, the whole thesis is my original work.

The reference system used has been modelled on "The Harvard Method" as reflected in *Reference Techniques* published by the University of South Africa Library (Sixth Revision). In addition to this reference system, End Notes have been used for comment and elucidation. Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version of the Bible.

ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CRESR	Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility
EBSemSA	Evangelical Bible Seminary of Southern Africa
EWISA	*Evangelical Witness in South Africa*
ICT	Institute for Contextual Theology
LCWE	The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization
PACSA	Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness
SACC	South African Council of Churches
UDF	United Democratic Front
WCC	World Council of Churches

INTRODUCTION

This thesis with its central emphasis on the poor and its radical evangelical character has been, as its title indicates, formulated in a South African context. This means that in it there is a conscious endeavour to reflect on the situation in this country, to analyze evangelical theology as it is known here, and to attempt to formulate a more relevant expression of this theology as it arises from the particularities of the South African context.

This thesis has been written against the dark background of a history of oppression in which the weak and poor in South Africa have suffered indescribably at the hands of the powerful and the rich. It is also written against the background of a new hope which is beginning to dawn in the midst of this darkness. For since February 1990, with the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the ANC, the oppressed in South Africa have begun to discern a new light at the end of the tunnel. For although the "new South Africa" has not yet appeared and the old order still prevails, there is in the developments of the first half of 1990 the promise that the liberation for which the black majority have struggled may well be on its way. "Apartheid as legislation", says John de Gruchy, "is dying, but as a culture it is still very much alive".1 It is in the context of this in-between time in which change appears to be coming and yet old systems persist, that this thesis is written.

Not only does this reflection emerge from a South African situation, it occurs within a context close to the horrific violence in the black areas of Pietermaritzburg, Natal. "The conflict between Inkatha on the one hand and COSATU, UDF and the ANC on the other has been going on since 1985. It has increased drastically since mid-1987 and in Natal over 3,500 people have been killed and an estimated 40,000 have either been injured or displaced from their homes" (PACSA 1989-90:7). Over 2500 have been killed in the

Pietermaritzburg area alone during this time (PACSA 1989-90:7). The fact that the experience of human suffering has come to feature as a determining factor in the formulation of this theology (I did not originally intend to focus on the poor in this specific way), is in no small measure due to the context in which this reflection has taken place. I have come to see that if Christian theology is to have any integrity and be in any sense consistent with God's love revealed in Jesus Christ then it cannot avoid the implications of such human agony in its quest for expression. To be authentic in the midst of these "killing fields" a theology which seeks to reflect the true nature of God needs to be a theology of the poor, or God becomes irrelevant here.

The degree to which this context of violence and suffering affects Christian action and thought is reflected in the PACSA2 Annual Report for May 1989 - April 1990 where in the staff report an item headed "Funerals Sub-Committee" appears. It reads in part:

> In all, we were involved in organising the funerals of over thirty people who died in the violence. We would start with either a list of missing persons or with a family who had lost a loved one and had approached us for assistance. The next step involved matching up bodies at the police mortuary with the right family for positive identification. (The state of many of the bodies makes this a particularly difficult process - it often takes the police many days to fetch the bodies from the fields and gutters of Edendale and the manner of death is often quite gruesome). Families would then be taken to the undertakers where funeral arrangements could be made.
>
> For those of us involved in this work, it has been a depressing and very traumatic experience - and we did not even know most of those who had been killed. The grief of the families is overwhelming and beyond our capacity for imagination.
>
> At the end of it all, standing at the Azalea cemetery for burials, row upon row of freshly dug gravesites bore eloquent testimony to the suffering inflicted on the Maritzburg community (1989-90:10).

This report is but one sample expression of the kind of suffering surrounding me as I have sought to formulate a theology shaped by

this factor in human experience. Even though I have not been as deeply involved in crisis work at this time as I would have liked, the awareness of what has been happening has directly affected the theological expression which has been made. As I understand the contextual nature of theology, it should not have been otherwise.

As a white, male, middle class South African shielded from the suffering experienced in the black community, I have hesitated to write concerning the poor and to attempt a formulation of theology from this perspective. Ideally and most credibly, this is an expression which needs to be made directly from the black experience of oppression itself. Therefore, I must immediately acknowledge my limitation in carrying out this theological task. Neither do I presume to write on behalf of those whose suffering is something foreign to my direct experience, for obviously I can only write from my own experience and perspective. Nevertheless, within the struggle between the rich and powerful and the poor and weak, there is I believe, a call for white South Africans to align themselves with the cause of the black majority and thus be placed in a position from which they may in solidarity with the oppressed formulate an understanding from their perspective. It is on the basis of this presupposition that I have conducted my research and writing.

This issue has also been raised by Charles Villa-Vicencio in writing of whether the non-poor can identify with and become part of the church of the poor. He writes:

> Part of the significance of Matthew 25:31-46 for the institutional church consists in the fact that it is addressed to people who are themselves neither hungry, thirsty, homeless strangers, naked, sick, or imprisoned. The question is, however, whether one who does not know the same kind of daily suffering as the poor can do more than offer charity and relief to those who suffer....The answer has something to do with risking security, comfort and reputation within the dominant society and, in terms of accepted values, working against self-interest. In so doing, in a limited way one shares in an experience of oppression and begins in a restricted sense to understand both the frustration of the poor - and what the prophets have referred to as the anger of God (1988:217).

At the heart of this issue lies the question of Christian self-understanding. In the theology being developed here this involves an orientation towards the poor both in social action and theological reflection which determines the direction of one's life and thought. In other words, being Christian means taking an option to side with the poor, both with their cause in society, and to whatever extent possible their life situation. With all the ambiguities, limitations and inadequacies this involves for the non-poor, this still constitutes I believe, a crucial issue for Christian being and acting in a rich-poor polarized society and church such as exists in South Africa.

Reflecting on this issue in a wider context Wolfgang Stegemann has said that "For us wealthy Christians, a 'theology of the poor' means that we must let our theological reflection be informed by the scandal of worldwide poverty, and that we not act any longer as if God has chosen the rich of this world" (1984:64).

Another aspect of the context from which I write concerns my background within conservative evangelicalism. The theology of the poor in this thesis is used to challenge aspects of the evangelical tradition, particularly those which reflect its conservative and sometimes fundamentalist character. This critique is based partly, at least, on extensive first hand experience of conservative evangelicalism. This involves almost thirty years as a minister in the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, including experience as a lecturer in two Baptist Theological Colleges in this country plus a two and a half year period spent in the USA, partly in Wheaton, Illinois ("the evangelical capital of the world"), and partly in Kentucky at a Southern Baptist College and as interim pastor of a Southern Baptist church. In this thesis I will attempt to formulate an evangelical theology which in certain significant respects challenges the dominantly conservative interpretations of evangelicalism which often, I believe, inhibit the development of a liberating evangelical social theology. This will involve, among

other things, the assertion that in South Africa conservative evangelicalism has tended to support and give legitimation to the apartheid system of government. Though this is strongly denied by leading conservatives today my own experience has led me to believe that it is unquestionably so.3 I do not believe that the central purpose of this thesis requires a systematic attempt to establish this contention (although scattered evidence for it will appear), therefore I have treated this as one of the presuppositions of my argument.

Another presupposition from which I write concerns the authority of scripture. In this I reflect an evangelical perspective in my assumption that the biblical documents taken together may be said to constitute a witness to God's self revelation which furnishes us with a controlling norm for Christian faith. In this affirmation I do not imply endorsement of biblical inerrancy (in my view insupportable on an inductive basis), or any one particular theory of inspiration. While affirming inspiration as such I do not believe any one interpretation of it such as "verbal inspiration" for instance, can be said to be representative of evangelicalism.

I identify with the perspective of Orlando Costas when he says:

> The fact that the words of the apostles and prophets are used to transmit God's Word does not exempt Scripture from historical conditioning. Indeed, the fact that these words are human makes them unique as vehicles of God's revelation. God has chosen to be known in and through human words. God's written revelation comes to us, therefore, as part of human history (1989:17).

This leads on to a further presupposition which concerns the question of the historical Jesus. In this thesis there is a strong emphasis on the incarnation in historically concrete terms. This implies that the New Testament documents furnish us with sufficiently complete evidence to affirm that in his life and death Jesus is both relevant and normative for Christian ethics (Yoder 1972:23). While acknowledging the complexities associated with this issue and the difficulties unearthed in historical study, I make a basic as-

sumption that in the New Testament we have a sufficiently cohesive portrayal of Jesus of Nazareth to permit the identification of the Jesus of history with the Christ of faith.

> The Jesus of history is the Christ of faith. It is in hearing the revolutionary rabbi that we understand the existential freedom which is asked of the church. As we look closer at the Jesus whom Albert Schweitzer rediscovered, in all his eschatalogical realism, we find an utterly precise and practicable ethical instruction, practicable because in him the kingdom has actually come within reach. In him the sovereignty of Jahweh has become human history (Yoder 1972:107).

Following this Introduction a diagram depicting the movement of the argument of this thesis appears. This diagram represents my effort to depict pictorially the thesis as a whole. It will be noted that there are three major movements within the flow of the argument. Commencing with a foundation laid in the first two chapters the movement proceeds to the development of the theme of the poor in the central two chapters. This in turn leads into the concluding chapters which utilize the developed theme both in terms of challenge and of formulation of alternatives to the items challenged.

It will be noticed that the chronological order is portrayed from the bottom up. This is done deliberately to emphasize the central characteristic of this theology of the poor as a theology which arises from the perspective of those on the underside of history.

In the overall argument of this thesis the following proposals are made.

(1) Radical evangelicalism is an identifiable movement within evangelicalism which can be distinguished as representing a thrust particularly relevant to the needs and aspirations of third world evangelicals.

(2) The poor are to be understood in the light of history and of scripture as those who are deprived of physical necessities and are politically and socially oppressed.

(3) Commitment to the poor is clearly a primary characteristic of radical evangelicalism both as a central factor in mission concern and as a key category in theological formulation.

(4) A radical evangelical theology of the poor is distinguished by two primary emphases; a preferential option on their behalf and a formulation of faith from the underside of history.

(5) This theology of the poor challenges traditional Western evangelical formulations on two major fronts. By its contextual nature it challenges its methodology, and by its holistic nature it challenges the individualism and dualism evident in mainline evangelical theology. In so doing alternative evangelical formulations are proposed in theology, hermeneutics and missiology which, I believe, are more able to empower people in contexts of oppression.

NOTES

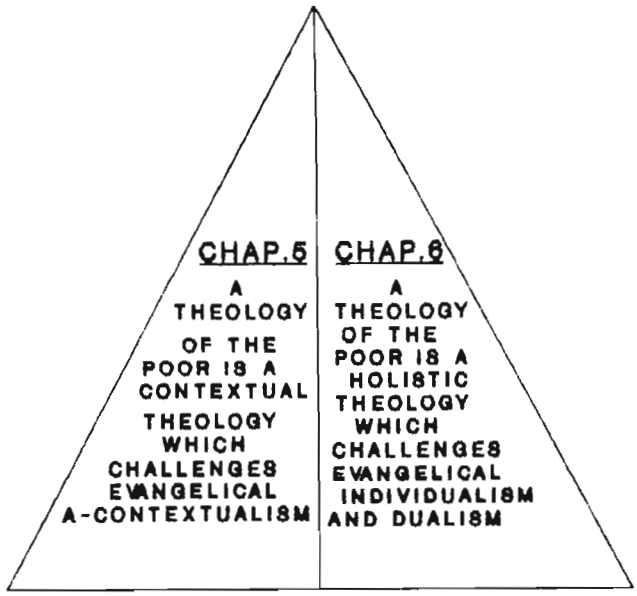
1 Address delivered at the PACSA annual Congress, Pietermaritzburg 23 June 1990.

2 PACSA (Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness) is an ecumenical body which has been deeply involved in crisis ministry in the Pietermaritzburg conflict.

3 For material supporting this contention see: The *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* document; *The South African Churches in a Revolutionary Situation* by Marjorie Hope and James Young; *The Church Struggle in South Africa* by John de Gruchy; *Trapped in Apartheid* by Charles Villa-Vicencio; *God in South Africa* by Albert Nolan; and the December 1989 edition on Right Wing Religious Movements of the *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*.

THESIS DIAGRAM

CONCLUSIONS



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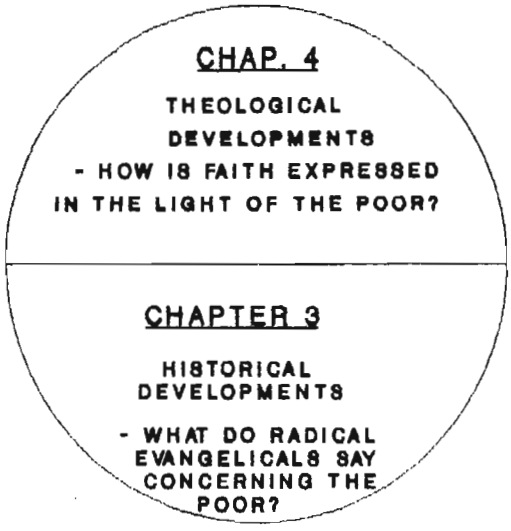

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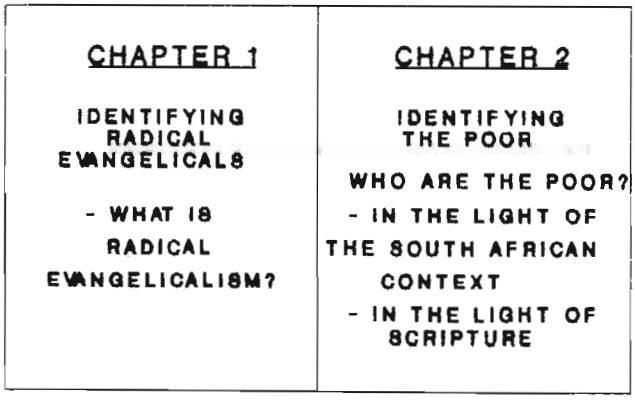

CHAPTER ONE

RADICAL EVANGELICALISM: IDENTIFIABLE MOVEMENT AND ALTERNATIVE FORMULATION

The overall concern of this thesis is to reflect on the poor. The formulation of a theology in the light of human oppression and exploitation is its primary objective. For this reason the fourth chapter "A Theology of the Poor" is the point to which the opening chapters will move and from which the concluding chapters will proceed. That chapter's argument concerning the poor as a category of theological understanding is the fulcrum upon which the argument of the whole thesis turns. Having established the primacy of this objective, it is necessary to add however, that this theology of the poor arises from a theological position which I have chosen to call "radical evangelical". It is a theological understanding of the poor consistent with and, as we shall see, fundamental to this radical perspective which is the focus of this thesis' attention. Therefore it is necessary at the outset to consider the nature of radical evangelicalism.

The purpose of this chapter is not only to define evangelicalism, or even more precisely, radical evangelicalism. This certainly is a crucial part of what it will seek to do, yet its purpose reaches beyond this. In this chapter an attempt will be made to establish that the radical evangelicalism in view is a "movement" which can be identified within evangelicalism. This form of evangelicalism reflects (both in actuality and by implication) a theology which in certain significant respects is an alternative to that commonly associated with mainline evangelicalism. By focussing on the identity of radical evangelicalism and some of the key issues in which it is distinguished from the dominant tradition the way will be prepared for developing a theological perspective which is a challenge to some of the perceived inadequacies within this tradition and a viable alternative to them. In so doing it is an

evangelical statement which will be attempted, for the perspectives and presuppositions reflected in this thesis are essentially evangelical in character.

In some cases the developing theology of this thesis will make proposals which go beyond what has already been clearly stated by radical evangelicals. In such cases this theology's formulation is an attempt to draw out and develop the implications which I believe are present in radical evangelicalism. In such extrapolations I express views for which I alone am responsible yet in which I endeavour to remain in harmony with the main emphases of radical evangelical thought.

1. A South African Model

In attempting to understand radical evangelicalism I have chosen to start with a South African model of this phenomenon. I believe that the *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* (EWISA)1 document provides us with an excellent example of this perspective and I will use it as a model for our initial consideration of radical evangelicalism.

During September 1985 a group of evangelicals met in a church in Orlando, Soweto to discuss the crisis in South Africa and how it affected evangelicals and their mission. This was during a state of emergency when many people were in detention, alarming fatalities where being reported every day, and the black community was feeling the full weight of the South African security forces' repressive actions including the invasion of schools with the arrest of even eight year old children (EWISA 1986:9).2 While in this meeting the group observed an attack by the security forces on the school next door to the church and saw children in frenzy trying to escape through breaking windows and fleeing. This was followed by further brutality and arrests in an attack on another school two hundred meters distant from the church. This led to a second scene in which the incensed children retaliated in a wave of

violence in which a commercial vehicle was stoned and the children after releasing the driver attempted to set it alight. It was in the context of such turbulence and the first hand experience of the agony of South Africa that the EWISA document was born. It was the work of black evangelicals trying to understand the role of the church in the midst of social crisis. In addition, the focus was on the particular responsibility of those identified as evangelicals in this situation. Before the group was the draft of the *Kairos Document*3 and the question of how evangelicals should respond to the present Kairos (moment of truth, crisis) (1986:9-10).

> Our frustration was that our own churches, groups or organizations were almost lost and could not provide prophetic light in the situation. At worst most would be supporting the status quo instead of being a conscience to the state. We felt that though our perception of the gospel helped us to be what we are, saved by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, born again into the new family of the Kingdom of God, our theology nevertheless was inadequate to address the crisis we were facing. In our series of discussions subsequent to this meeting we realized that our theology was influenced by American and European missionaries with political, social and class interests which were contrary or even hostile to both the spiritual and social needs of our people in this country (EWISA 1986:10).

These frustrations, expressed in the midst of social turmoil and eventually articulated in the EWISA document, make a significant statement which points towards and helps identify a distinct movement within evangelicalism. In South Africa the document gave rise to the Concerned Evangelicals organization with a concern for the oppressed community and for the way in which evangelicalism in general has sided against this community. Other evangelical groups such as Fellowship of Concerned Baptists and Relevant Pentecostal Witness have sprung up as a further expression of this same concern. It is in such groups reflecting the EWISA perspective that the South African expression of what I term radical evangelicalism is located.

In reflecting on the EWISA document it may be helpful to see this as a model which may be used to represent the radical evangelical

perspective. I speak of "model" here not as a formal representation or an exact replica of some ideal but rather, more modestly, as one example of the form in which the concerns of evangelicals in a context of oppression may be expressed. We may say then that the EWISA document provides one particular model of radical evangelicalism by displaying the following characteristics.

(1) The EWISA document is a third world statement which challenges the idea that evangelicalism is a Western form of understanding and is officially represented in Western ideas and formulations. As a statement issuing from a black South African context and reflecting the thought of those for whom oppression is a reality of experience it contrasts with the kind of statements which come from contexts sheltered from such harsh realities. Because, however, of the dominant influence of Euro-American ways of thinking on the whole evangelical community, such evangelicals discover a tension between the a-contextualism in which they have been schooled and the demands their situations make for a socially relevant form of faith. This experience has lead to a questioning of these dominant formulations, especially those which divorce spiritual experience from socio-political concerns. Thus EWISA criticizes dualism and its effects as follows.

> What this dualism has done is that one can live a pietistic "spiritual" life and still continue to oppress, exploit, and dehumanize people. And those who are victims of the oppression, exploitation and dehumanization are prohibited from complaining or resisting it because this would amount to worrying about material things that have nothing to do with one's spirituality. Actually trying to engage in a struggle to get rid of this oppression is seen as having "fallen" from grace. In this way the oppressors of this world are able to maintain their system by conveniently confining the gospel to the spiritual realm alone (1986:16).

This holistic emphasis reflects the basic character of radical evangelicalism as that form of evangelical theology which gives particular expression to the concerns, the hopes and aspirations of people from the third world where the experience of oppression is often a part of daily life. It also, I believe, includes those

from other contexts whose identification with these concerns involves a social and theological orientation in this direction. This indicates a kind of evangelical faith in which the dominance of Western norms and categories is questioned.

(2) In the EWISA document there is a clearly expressed critique of the mainline evangelical community. The sub-title of the document reads *A Critique of Evangelical Theology and Practice by South African Evangelicals themselves.*

> We wish to confess that to a large extent the evangelical community has chosen to avoid that burden of the socio-political crisis in the country. Or at worst, this community we are so committed to, has chosen to take sides in support of the apartheid system in South Africa which is responsible for the violence that is engulfing our country (1986:12).

This support of the oppressive system has led to a crisis of faith in the black townships for too often in the experience of such people "born again" Christians have acted as agents of state oppression in the name of "law and order" and of combating "communism" (1986:13).

In its voicing of prophetic protest against what it sees as the co-option of the mainline evangelical community by the oppressive system EWISA has met with severe criticism from conservative sources. Its critique of evangelicalism has been regarded as extreme and unwarrented. The Gospel Defence League newsletter of October 1986 speaks of "the hateful spirit which pervades the document", sees it as anti-Bible, anti-evangelism, and anti-mission, and also berates it as an intertwining of marxist and biblical arguments which makes "a sport of offending the believers and causing them to sin". In the *Protestant Reveille* A.H. Jeffree James refers to it as "an attack upon the very ethos of Evangelicalism, its theology and achievements". He sees it as presenting "a caricature of the whole evangelical movement" in which the bible "insofar as (it) is used at all...is made to speak with the voice of liberation theology" (Jeffree James 1987:4,7). In contrast EWISA has gained more accep-

tance among evangelicals outside of South Africa. In *Transformation* it is reported that

> ...*Evangelical Witness in South Africa* has been warmly welcomed around the world. First published by Concerned Evangelicals in Soweto, it has been reprinted in *Transformation* January 1987, in the World Council of Churches Monthly Newsletter on Evangelism for April, by the Evangelical Alliance and Regnum Books in Great Britain, in Germany by *Idea* (the newsletter of the German Evangelical Alliance) and by Evangelisches Missionwerk, and will be published in the USA by Eerdmans in June (1987:53).

The contrast between the reception of EWISA by evangelicals inside and outside of South Africa points to the particular conservatism of the white South African evangelical community. It also suggests the degree to which this community is insensitive to the experience of oppressive suffering of the black community and indicates a lack of contextual awareness in its theological evaluations.

(3) A further way in which EWISA is seen to model a radical evangelical character is in the stand it takes against oppression in society in which it identifies with the weak and poor against the powerful and rich. This comes out very clearly in the way it critiques what it calls the "Theology of the Status Quo" (1986:20). This has met with strong opposition in some quarters. "In the Full Gospel church, two ministers who signed the document, Lucas Ngoetjana and Vasco Seleoane have been asked to either renounce the document or leave the church" (Lund 1988:55).

The stand some socially active evangelicals have taken against the oppression of the state has also provoked some fellow evangelicals to call on the authorities to restrain them. Lund refers to instances where "white leaders of particular evangelical churches have informed security police of the involvement of black evangelical ministers, leading to detention and harassment in several cases" (1988:88).

(4) The EWISA document also exemplifies a radical evangelical approach by highlighting the need for an alternative formulation of

evangelical faith. It focuses on the conservatism of the mainline community and its opposition to ecumenical leaders who resist the system and support the oppressed and then commends a more open approach to non-evangelical Christians (1986:27-30). Commenting on this critique of conservatism in EWISA and its implication of an alternative approach J. Deotis Roberts in the Foreword to the North American edition has written that

> ...the authors express their concern for the enormity of the problem of conservatism among the churches in South Africa. This is the result of the sheer abundance of evangelical Christians in all denominations. The religious situation is such that the phenomena thus far described are widespread and extremely powerful. If the social conditions of injustice and dehumanization are to be changed, there must be a radical reformulation of evangelical faith, thought, and action (1986:10).

The awareness of the need for an alternative, more relevant and socially powerful form of evangelical theology is expressed in the Preface to EWISA in which the authors acknowledge: "our theology...was inadequate to address the crisis we were facing" (1986:10). EWISA itself does not set out to formulate such an alternative. It is more a crisis statement responding to a situation which exposed the inadequacies of its own tradition, and as such has an understandably negative emphasis. It does however, in the exposure of the incapacity of conservative formulations to meet the needs of oppressed evangelicals, call implicitly for an alternative to these formulations. This I see as a fundamental challenge to those who identify with a more radical form of evangelicalism. It is to this challenge of formulating an alternative to the dominant conservatism in evangelical theology that this thesis seeks to respond. The South African model which has been surveyed provides a starting point for this endeavour by suggesting a way of being evangelical in which the dominant trend is not conservative endorsement (implicit or explicit) of unjust social structures, but rather radical resistance to them.

2. An Identifiable Movement

It is the contention of this thesis that radical evangelicalism is an identifiable movement within the broader evangelical community. The separate identity of this movement is emphasized because of the perceived need, particularly in third world contexts, for a more liberative form of evangelical theology which nevetheless adheres to the basics of evangelicalism. Writing in the Foreword of Thomas Hanks' *God So Loved the Third World*, Orlando Costas has said of this work:

> ...it represents a foundational work of the emerging radical Evangelical theology. That is what we call the stream of theology that works within the following parameters of the historical Protestant-Evangelical movement: the normative character of the Bible in the life and mission of the church; a personal experience with the gospel through faith in Jesus Christ; and obeying and communicating the gospel as the way to evince the fruit of life in the Holy Spirit. In this way such a theology attempts to trace those parameters back to the origins and carry them to their final results - all of which make this a prophetic and contextual movement in Latin American Protestantism (Costas 1983:vii).

2.1. Radical Identity

In this formulation it is acknowledged that the term "radical evangelical" is imprecise. It is not universally used to designate the constituency I have in mind, but then neither is any other term. It is also acknowledged that the parameters of this constituency are not easily drawn. It refers to a dynamic and somewhat flexible movement which draws together those sharing a similar vision, but because it lacks a clearly developed sense of self identity it is often difficult to determine which groups or individuals are radical evangelical. Despite these constraints, it is possible, I believe, to discern certain streams within the evangelical community which run counter to some of its dominant inclinations and together form a movement which stands in tension with mainline conservative evangelicalism.

In my view there are three major streams which together form a distinct grouping within the broader community and so may be said to comprise the radical evangelical movement. They are, first, the Anabaptist movement with its emphasis on radical discipleship and the church as an alternative community. This movement has had a formative influence in the development of a strong social concern among evangelicals. The second stream is the movement of social protest and radical critique of establishment evangelicalism in America which is epitomized in Jim Wallis and the Sojourners community in Washington D.C. Third, there is the movement of third world missiologists with its emphasis on holistic evangelism whose thrust is centred in the International Fellowship of Mission Theologians and the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies. People like the late Orlando Costas, Rene Padilla, Samuel Escobar, Kwame Bediako, Michael Nazir-Ali, Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden are representative of this group. In addition to these movements there are other groups and individuals who do not easily fit into these categories, who nevertheless are evangelical and share at least some of the same perspectives. Examples are black American radicals, "Evangelicals for Social Action" in the USA, British and European evangelicals expressing the same concerns (David Sheppard in *Bias to the Poor*), and individuals such as Ron Sider and Stephen Mott who may not fit neatly into one of the above categories. In a South African context organisations such as Concerned Evangelicals, Fellowship of Concerned Baptists, and Relevant Pentecostal Witness may be seen to embody this same vision.

Referring to various evangelical groupings mentioned by Peter Beyerhaus, David Bosch has spoken of one of these

> ...the so-called "radical evangelicals" who have emerged especially during the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelisation (1974) and among whom Latin Americans such as Samuel Escobar, Rene Padilla and Orlando Costas are prominent, but also various North American groups, especially Mennonites. They emphasise, on biblical grounds, the necessity of a socio-political involvement (Bosch 1980:30).

In this form of evangelicalism the term "radical" is used in its original sense of going to the root of things. Referring to Dale Brown's book *The Christian Revolutionary* Quebedeaux points to his two-fold designation of radical as that which relates to the root, is "original, fundamental, and inherent", and secondly its character as a "fundamental departure from or challenge to the status quo" (Quebedeaux 1978: 147-148). The use of this term is acknowledged to be problematic. It is true that the word, particularly in South Africa, has pejorative connotations and its common usage carries with it notions of extremism, militant aggression and lack of reason. This is exacerbated by the endeavour of the South African government to totally discredit the expression by linking it to violent confrontation and at the same time, in contrast, projecting its own position as one of reasoned moderation. This political ploy which seems to be very successful, at least in white evangelical circles, creates a climate in which there is a paranoid reaction to this term and in which it is virtually thought treasonable to describe oneself as radical. Yet despite negative connotations both in and outside South Africa, this term "radical evangelical" is one which well describes a stance which is not only legitimately evangelical but, given the realities of the South African situation, can be and is seen from within the evangelical context as that which is most "Christian". There is need to reclaim this much-abused term.

The term itself is one associated with the Anabaptists to whom the label "radical reformation" was applied by Professor George H Williams of Harvard Divinity School. John Howard Yoder, while acknowledging some of its shortcomings, adheres to this designation "`radical reformation', as representative of a genuinely distinctive vision of what the church is about in the world" (1984:106). For our purposes it is the term best suited to describe an evangelical approach in which the gospel is seen to be radical, not only in terms of personal identity and morality, but also in terms of challenging structures of social evil. Therefore the term "radical evangelical" is deliberately used with the emphasis on its original connotations of going to the root of things, and standing

in uncompromising opposition to evil systems of power and authority. With this usage it is denied that this term must necessarily convey ideas of violence, militantly aggressive confrontation, and extremes of unreasoning fanaticism. In its purest meaning evangelical radicalism needs to be seen as that which is distinct from these elements (which in any case are often the distorted representations by the powerful of the compassionate struggle for the poor and oppressed), and has as its primary motive the desire to follow Christ's way which stands in radical contradiction to many of the ways common in society.

Alternative terminology for the position represented has been considered, but despite the fact that "radical" may not always fit perfectly, it seems the best option for describing the particular type of evangelicalism under consideration. A term sometimes used is "left wing evangelicals", but this kind of comparison on a sliding horizontal scale while having some comparative use is not, in my view, the best means of locating a particular stance. Comparative descriptions fail in that they lack the potential to convey the essence of that represented. "Young evangelicals" is the term used by Quebedeaux, but in my view it suffers from the obvious disadvantage relating to age. "Justice and peace evangelicals" has much to commend it, but has the disadvantage that it portrays an essential position in terms of its expression rather than its foundation, besides being a somewhat clumsy term. "Concerned evangelicals" is a South African designation with similar connotations, but it is rather ambivalent and vague.

Further to these observations the term "radical" may legitimately be associated with the term "evangelical" in the following usages.

(1) The use of "radical" is first and foremost in connection with Christian discipleship, that is it is seen as referring to a life lived in obedience to Christ and his norms, with emphasis on the fact that all of life, not only spiritual and individual concerns, are affected by this. The radicalism in view involves uncompromising opposition to evil social structures. This stance though it

may well cause such evangelicals to take a position vis-a-vis society similar to that of non-Christian radicals and in political accord with them must nevertheless be seen as radical first and foremost in terms of its discipleship, its impetus being derived primarily from Christian sources. For the radical evangelical it is Christ in the struggle who must determine all things, rather than the struggle itself. Thus while radical evangelicalism can never be conceived as neutral in a situation of political and social oppression, its primary point of reference must remain its Christian discipleship.

(2) The word, as already noted, is used in relation to a socio-political stance in which oppression is challenged and opposed. This is based on the conviction that spirituality, to have meaning in a world of injustice and oppression, should necessarily include concern about the social and political evils of the time. To be unconcerned or uncommitted in this context is to remove faith from the arena of life.

(3) The word "radical" is also used to indicate an alternative approach within the church. Where the word is used the question must eventually arise; radical in relation to what? Historically the "radical reformation" spoke of a movement that went beyond the Protestant Reformation of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. Speaking of the partial nature of the Protestant Reformation, for instance their retention of the control of the church by civil authority, Yoder sees the Anabaptist movement as radical in relation to the prevailing norms of the church of the time.

> The groups called "radical reformers" carried the initial reformation vision through to reject as well these indices of the post-Constantinian synthesis. Thereby they changed not simply the definition of certain ministries or churchly practices, but also the entire understanding of what it means to be Christian, and consequently also of how the body of believers relates to the powers of this world. (1984:107).

In this sense radical evangelicals may be said to challenge establishment evangelical conformity to the norms of socio-political

systems. Its radicalism consists in its call to an alternative approach and its rejection of prevailing patterns of acquiescence and passivity. It is a protest movement, not only in society but also in the church, and particularly in that section of the church of which it is part. Its protest arises not from any necessary negativism in its makeup but from its concern for the prophetic witness of the evangelical movement, which witness it sees as part of a tradition (both biblical and historical) that is largely neglected.

(4) The word "radical" is also used here with special reference to the situation of the church, particularly the evangelical branch of it, in South Africa. The concern is to reflect the shape radical evangelicalism does take and also consistently should take in this context. In its usage an attempt is made to answer the question; what kind of evangelical social concern is relevant in South Africa? In this context "radical" may be understood to involve at least two elements.

Its usage refers first to a clear-cut, unambiguous rejection of apartheid, that is apartheid seen not just in the general sense of undefined racial discrimination, but apartheid specifically identified with the system by which the present government operates. In this regard Albert Nolan's assessment is helpful:

> ...when we speak of apartheid we are not referring only to those laws and policies that discriminate against people of colour; we are referring to the whole system with its security laws, press curbs, and states of emergency and with its consumerism, money-making, labour laws and class conflicts. We call the whole system apartheid because its dominant characteristic is racial or ethnic discrimination (1988:68-69).

The foundation of the rejection already mentioned, is a perception of this system as basically unjust. This is in contrast to views which in varying degrees see it as more or less justifiable even though imperfect. In the radical approach there may be variations of assessment in detail, but at its heart is a perspective which sees an essential flaw and lack of normality which gives this

society, even considering its most positive aspects, a character which is dominantly unjust. This assessment implies a social analysis enlightened by the fact that the gospel is seen to have direct bearing on the nature of society. Seen in this light evangelicalism that is radical views the evangel as closely linked to justice, in fact inseparably intertwined with it.

The fact of the social relevance of the gospel relates also to the second element which is involvement in the struggle for justice expressed as commitment to the cause of the poor and oppressed. This constitutes a perspective in which South Africa is viewed from the underside, that is from the position of the victims of apartheid. Knowledge of the true nature of the system is gained in this context. For radical evangelicals it is this option for the poor, which sees God as the God of the poor and understands the gospel as "good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18), which is decisive.

These considerations create an image of a negative movement, one whose distinctive element lies in that it stands against something. This is one of the disadvantages of the word "radical". In the words of Yoder it is "...logically imprecise. Its meaning depends on some other thrust or process which it 'goes beyond,' without the direction or quality of that 'beyond' being specified" (1984:203). While it appears that there is a burden of negativity from which radicalism cannot escape, there are three other factors which qualify this perspective. The first is that for "Christian radicalism" the element of discipleship exercises a controlling influence which is essentially positive, that is conformity to the model of Christ. The second factor refers to radicalism's nature as that which goes to the root of things. This pursuit of honesty in which disturbing realities are accepted, including the pervasiveness of evil in societal structures, leads to a tension created not by radical responses as such, but rather by the very nature of existing antitheses. Speaking of the upsurge of religious conservatism in America, Stanley Hauerwas has said; "Such movements are...unable to contemplate that there might be irresolvable tensions between being Christian and being a 'good American'".

(1984:12). The third factor relates to the function of hope within the struggle for justice. Radical evangelical eschatology may be seen as affirming the presence of the future in the person of Christ, whose presence provides hope in the midst of the struggle. While neither wedded to unrealistic utopianism nor denying Christ's future advent in which the Kingdom of God will be perfectly consummated, this perspective affirms a "this-worldly" hope in which God is seen to be working in our history for the betterment and liberation of human society.

2.2. Third World Perspectives

In our identification of radical evangelicalism we have already noted its third world connections. It can, I believe, be represented as that form of evangelical theology which reflects the concerns related to contexts of third world poverty and aspiration.

Vinay Samuel and Albrecht Hauser have designated the movement here called "radical evangelical" as "a Movement for Integral Evangelism" (1989:10). In listing characteristics in "models of integral evangelism" they say: "the models are of people of whom a vast number are from the Two Thirds World.4 They are neither copies nor transplants from the West. They are true native plants grown in a local situation" (1989:11).

Orlando Costas, in noting the influence of Euro-American evangelicalism in the third world, has said: "Notwithstanding this reality, however, there seems to be developing in the Two Thirds World a different kind of evangelical theology that addresses questions not usually dealt with by evangelical mainstream theologians in Euro-America, employing a different methodology and drawing different conclusions" (Costas 1986:312). In this essay on "Evangelical Theology in the Two Thirds World" Costas continues by asserting that there is one primary characteristic which distinguishes evangelical theology, that is its "missionary intent", its "burning

passion for the communication of the gospel, especially in those areas where it has not yet been proclaimed" (1986:312).

This missionary character, says Costas, is supported by four theological principles:

> ...the authority of Scripture, salvation by grace through faith, conversion as a distinct experience of faith and a landmark of Christian identity, and the demonstration of the "new life" through piety and moral discipline. The first two are the formal and material principles of the Protestant Reformation. The other two are tied to the so-called Second Reformation (the pietist movement, including the evangelical awakening, which sought to complete the first [theological] Reformation by advocating the reformation of life). The last two principles are also connected with American revivalism and the holiness movement (1986:312).

These four principles, according to Costas, have affected the historical development of evangelicalism in various ways. The first two principles have been stressed within the Calvinist and Lutheran traditions which highlight the orthodox nature of evangelicalism. The latter two principles have received more emphasis in the pietist tradition where the stress is on the practical and experiential side of evangelicalism (1986:313).

In surveying different kinds of evangelicalism Costas has focussed particularly on the North American group designated by Gabriel Fackre as the "New Evangelicals".

> The New Evangelicals, by and large, represent the North American leadership of the Lausanne Movement, the World Evangelical Fellowship (and its North American counterpart, the National Association of Evangelicals), as well as the two largest missionary consortia, the Independent Foreign Missions Association (IFMA) and the Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA). They also have the most visible presence in theological (and missiological) educational institutions. During the last several decades they have been the largest exporters of North American evangelical theology (1986:314).

He proceeds to contrast the New Evangelicals and their theology with "Evangelical Theology in the Two Thirds World". For New

Evangelicals it is the Reformation's formal principle of biblical authority and material principle of salvation in Christ through faith which constitute the heart of evangelicalism. However, during the last decade at least, attention has been focussed on the formal question of the authority and inspiration of scripture rather than the teaching of scripture. "It is no surprise that the most widely published representative of this brand of evangelicalism, Carl F.H. Henry...entitled his six volume magnum opus *God, Revelation, and Authority*" (Costas 1986:315). In contrast, third world evangelicals "do not appear to be as concerned over the formal authority question as they are over the material principle" (1986:314-315). To support this assertion Costas surveys three major evangelical theological conferences in the third world held in Thailand in March 1982, Korea in August 1982, and Mexico in June 1984 (1986:315-320).

Emerging out of these considerations Costas proposes that the real difference between New Evangelical theology and third world evangelical theology lies in the New Evangelical concern for the formal principle of Protestant theology. This contrasts with third world evangelicals where:

> The emphasis on the content of the gospel and the teaching of the biblical text rather than on formal questions of authority and the philosophical presuppositions behind a particular doctrine of inspiration is freeing evangelical theology in the Two Thirds World to employ a contextual hermeneutics patterned after the transpositional method of the New Testament. This also explains why evangelicals in the Two Thirds World are more willing to deal with questions of religious pluralism and social, economic, and political oppression than are most evangelical theologians in the One Third World (1986:320).

Costas sees mainstream Western evangelical theologians as "too obsessed with the Enlightenment and not enough with the social, economic, political, cultural, and religious reality of most people in the world" (1986:320). This has led to an emphasis on the "reasonableness" of faith with the nonreligious unbeliever as interlocutor. Consequently, "the second phase of the Enlightenment, as-

sociated with the nineteenth-century movement of freedom from political, cultural, economic, and social oppression, has been on the whole a peripheral issue in Euro-American theology, including evangelical theology" (1986:320-321). In contrast, for third world theologians this has been an issue of fundamental importance. While New Evangelicals have been preoccupied with the theoretical denial of faith, it is third world evangelicals who have addressed its practical denial "in the unjust treatment of the weak and downtrodden" (1986:321). In this contrast the Western model reveals an incapacity to address some of life's most urgent issues. "For all its missionary passion and experience, mainstream evangelical theology in North America has yet to learn from its missionary heritage how to ask more central questions concerning the destiny of humankind, the future of the world, and even the central concerns of the Scriptures" (1986:321).

In my view the key issue emerging in these observations of Costas concerns relevance and empowerment. What understanding of the gospel relates to people at the grass roots level? What form of evangelical faith can enable humankind's third world majority to experience a transforming and more humane form of life? These are urgent questions in South Africa with its large black majority where mainline evangelical theology has generally conformed to the New Evangelical pattern portrayed by Costas. I suggest that the form of evangelicalism demanded by the realities of this context is that developing within third world settings rather than the North American model. It is this perspective which is reflected in the "radical evangelicalism" of this thesis.

2.3. The Broader Context: Evangelical Identity

2.3.1. Influence and Diversity

Writing in 1978 concerning the growth and influence of evangelicals in America Richard Quebedeaux said:

> In the course of just the last few years, *born again* - the once laugh provoking term describing evangelical Christians - has become a respectable, if not glamorous, designation, no less fashionable and chic than the growing number of national celebrities who unabashedly declare that they have been born again. Evangelical Christianity has finally emerged from its anticultural ghetto into the mainstream of American life. It is now a force to be reckoned with (1978:XI).

It is indisputable that the influence and significance of evangelicalism has grown remarkably in America in the last three decades, and the impact of this has been evident in South African Christianity. After a visit to the United States in 1977 South African John de Gruchy wrote:

> The fact is that "evangelical Christianity" has grown enormously, its influence has spread widely, and it has become an ecclesiastical, theological, and socio-political force to be reckoned with, not only in North America but also in other parts of the world, including South Africa. Indeed, the parallels between the United States and South Africa in this regard are interesting, even striking (1978:45).

In a volume mainly reflecting contributions at a 1983 conference on "Evangelical Christianity and Modern America, 1930-1980", editor George Marsden has written of "the re-emergence of evangelicalism as a formidable force in modern America. This resurgence, which involves both actual growth and a striking change in public attention, is one of the remarkable developments in contemporary culture" (1984:vii). There seems little doubt concerning the prominence of evangelicalism in modern Christianity. When we turn to its meaning however, the picture is less clear.

Robert K. Johnston has written that

> It is increasingly difficult to provide an inclusive definition of evangelicalism....Even Billy Graham has been quoted as saying, "Evangelicalism is a great mosaic God is building, but if you asked me to, I'd have a hard time giving you a definition of what it is today". This is the same Graham about whom Martin Marty writes, evangelicals can be defined as "people who find Billy Graham or his viewpoints acceptable" (1985:2).

Writing in 1976 of an evangelical identity crisis, Carl Henry in a *Christianity Today* series entitled "Evangelicals in Search of Identity" said:

> Twenty-five years ago there were signs that a long-caged lion would break its bars and roar upon the American scene with unsuspected power....While still on the loose, and still sounding his roar, the evangelical lion is nonetheless slowly succumbing to an identity-crisis. The noteworthy cohesion that American evangelicals gained in the sixties has been fading in the seventies through multiplied internal disagreements and emerging counterforces (1976:32-33).

The fading cohesion of which Henry speaks is a trend which has continued, so that the diversity of evangelicalism is more pronounced today than when these words were written.

This diversity is reflected also in the South African situation. Chris Lund has written that "Evangelicalism is a diversified and enigmatic element within the Christian church, not least in South Africa. Its precise confessional and institutional boundaries are difficult to define, and its relation to the wider church is usually unstated" (1988:8). Some of the bodies which may be seen to belong to the evangelical community are: denominations such as the Baptist Union of Southern Africa, the Baptist Convention of South Africa, and the Church of England in South Africa; various Pentecostal churches such as the Apostolic Faith Mission plus the new forms of charismatic Christianity exemplified in the Rhema Bible churches; various mission agencies like Africa Enterprise and Reinhardt Bonnke's Christ for all Nations plus missionary societies like Africa Evangelical Fellowship; the Evangelical Fellowship of

South Africa, an organization promoting evangelical unity; student groupings like the Student's Christian Association and youth ministries like Scripture Union plus the evangelicals in the "mainline" churches. In addition there are groups as enormously divergent as Concerned Evangelicals and the right wing Gospel Defence League both of which lay claim to the label "evangelical". This listing itself reflects greater familiarity with "white" evangelicalism than with the variety of forms it also takes in the black community. In addition, the position of the Dutch Reformed Churches is somewhat ambivalent. Though often not associated with the evangelical "movement" as such, in their conservative theological orientation and political affinities they show similarities to evangelicalism.

2.3.2. The term "Evangelical"

The term evangelical is derived from the Greek *euangelion* meaning good news or gospel. It carries the meaning "pertaining to the gospel" and refers in its primary sense to the endeavour to conform to the basic doctrines of the gospel. So evangelical theology is in essence gospel theology, the understanding, life and mission which arises from the gospel of Christ. This has of course been interpreted by Christians in various ways and that which is commonly called "evangelical" may be said to be one particular form of this, for it is doubtful whether any group of Christians would claim to be non-evangelical in this primary sense.

In this thesis the term evangelical will be used in the "popular" sense to refer to those Christians who by their theological and missiological emphasis have come to distinguish themselves by this designation and are usually thought of in these terms.

Writing concerning "evangelical" Gabriel Fackre has said:

> ...the term came into use at the Reformation to identify Protestants, especially as they held to the belief in justification by grace through faith and the supreme

> authority of scripture (often considered the material and formal principles of Reformation teaching). Subsequently the meaning tended to narrow, with evangelicalism referring to those who espoused and experienced justification and scriptural authority in an intensified way: personal conversion and a rigorous moral life, on the one hand, and concentrated attention on the Bible as a guide to conviction and behaviour on the other, with special zeal for the dissemination of Christian faith so conceived (evangelism)....Today evangelical continues as an adjective in the names of some Protestant denominations and is also used in theology to identify Reformation doctrine (viz. Karl Barth's *Evangelical Theology*), but it is more generally associated with the aforementioned subsidiary meaning of interiorization and intensification as in "born again Christianity" (1983:191).

This statement from Fackre shows a similar breadth of interpretation to Costas' fourfold characterization noted earlier. This may be formulated by saying that four key words summarize the meaning of this expression "evangelical". I see these words to be authority, grace, conversion and discipleship. Authority concerns the role of scripture and reflects the belief that the gospel has its origin in divine revelation. Grace emphasizes divine initiative and action in salvation and God's free gift received by faith. Conversion points to the experience of new life in which people are transformed and renewed.5 Discipleship relates to the demands of the gospel in terms of following Christ in the new ways of his kingdom. In the first two words, the emphasis of the Protestant Reformation tradition is epitomized, while the final two represent that of the pietist-revivalist tradition. Obviously this is a generalized statement for all four of these concepts are affirmed by both traditions, but nevertheless this is where the stress lies. It is also clear from Costas' analysis that the emphasis in the new third world evangelical theology is on conversion and discipleship more than authority and grace. While this is done together with the affirmation of biblical authority and divine grace the demands of contexts of oppression call for a particular emphasis on conversion and discipleship.

Donald Dayton has formulated this distinction in emphasis by referring to the "Awakening" or Wesleyan paradigm which he contrasts

with the Reformation and Fundamentalist paradigms. He sees this as a more socially powerful paradigm which has left a legacy of good works rather than "speculative theology".

> It may be overstating a significant truth to notice that, in part because of the emphasis on faith, the generations after the Reformation were devoted to the clarification of the faith and they left us the legacy of great creeds and doctrinal symbols. The Wesleyan tradition, on the other hand, has left us a legacy of works of love - the crusade against slavery, concern for the poor, campaigns for the reform of society, and so on - in its effort to "spread scriptural holiness across the land and to reform the nation" (Dayton 1985:128).

2.3.3. Types of Evangelicalism

The diversity of evangelicalism has already been noted. In the face of the various expressions of evangelical faith it is interesting and helpful to consider classification of evangelicalism into different forms, types, or sub-cultures.

Gabriel Fackre in writing concerning evangelicalism has listed five "sub-communities:" (a) Fundamentalist evangelicals, (b) Old evangelicals i.e "exponents of the life of personal piety", (c) New evangelicals, those adding "an accent on the rational defense of the faith and seek(ing) to relate piety more aggressively to social issues", (d) Justice and peace evangelicals, also called "young evangelicals", a vocal minority radically critiquing oppressive systems, and (e) Charismatic evangelicals (1983:191).

John de Gruchy has also listed five different types of evangelical Christianity: (a) Evangelical Protestantism, i.e. forms of Christianity remaining faithful to the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformation, (b) Evangelical Pietism, groups reacting to "dead orthodoxy" and emphasizing religious experience and sanctification, (c) Evangelical Fundamentalism, (d) Conservative Evangelicalism, and (e) Radical Evangelicalism (1978:46-47).

In our consideration of radical evangelical theology I suggest the following five categories as an appropriate analysis.

(1) In the first place the Radical Evangelicalism on which we are focussing may be seen to have as its major thrust the conviction that the essence of Christianity lies in discipleship, a discipleship which involves the influence of Christ affecting all spheres of human life. In this regard the influence of Anabaptist thinking is significant. Harold S. Bender, in what has come to be regarded as a classic statement of Anabaptist thought entitled "The Anabaptist Vision", said in 1943:

> First and fundamental in the Anabaptist vision was the conception of the essence of Christianity as discipleship. It was a concept which meant the transformation of the entire way of life of the individual believer and of society so that it should be fashioned after the teachings and example of Christ.... The focus of the Christian life was to be not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as it was for Luther, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct and the consequent Christianization of all human relationships. The true test of the Christian, they held is discipleship. The great word of the Anabaptists was not "faith" as it was for the reformers, but "following" (1972:42-43).

(2) In Pietist Evangelicalism we find a form of evangelicalism in which the experience of God is central. Its emphasis is upon the devotion and spiritual development of the individual, the reality of religious experience, and the importance of prayer. Examples may be seen in the Moravian Brotherhood and Wesleyan Revival, followed by the Great Awakening and revivals of the nineteenth century (de Gruchy 1978:46). While remaining true to the principle of biblical authority evangelical pietists focus more attention on the subjective rather than objective aspects of faith. John Wesley said: "Orthodoxy, I say, or right opinion is but a slender part of religion at best, and sometimes no part of it at all" (Shelley 1967:17). In a South African context the influence of Andrew Murray Jnr. on the Dutch Reformed Church and beyond, is an example of the power of pietism. I have also heard the opinion expressed that in the history of South African Baptists there are three tradi-

tions; conservative theology, revivalism, and pietism, and that pietism is the most important of these. In my view a good case could be made to support this contention, and its extension to the wider South African evangelical community.

Pietism stands as a needed corrective to Protestant scholasticism with its static formulations of dogma, but carries with it the danger of quietism, or withdrawal from the concerns of society. This, however, has not always followed, for many like Wesley have been active in social concern and like the Clapham sect and Salvation Army, involved in combating the ills of society. In viewing the various streams that have flowed into the evangelical community there is much to commend the contention of Dayton that the revivalist-pietist tradition is more open to socio-political concerns, especially those relating to concern for the poor and oppressed, than the Princeton-dispensationalist tradition (1976:121-135). One reason for this may be that those in this tradition hold to truth in a less doctrinaire way and are thus less inhibited in response to human need, that is less distracted and impeded by systems of belief which do not appear to encourage the humanitarian impulse, or in which a universal indiscriminate emphasis on the value of all human beings is not a prominent feature.

(3) In the category of Charismatic Evangelicalism there is a form of Christianity (generally evangelical in character) in which strong emphasis is placed on the Holy Spirit in his miraculous working, as well as the doctrine of the baptism in the Holy Spirit and practice of speaking in tongues. I believe that it is legitimate to consider the charismatic or renewal movement as part of the evangelical community, even though in some of its expressions it reaches beyond this description. This form of Christianity has experienced remarkable growth in recent years, not least in South Africa. Charismatics in South Africa can be seen to comprise three groupings. In the first place there are the charismatics who are spread throughout most of the traditionally non-charismatic churches, Catholic, ecumenical and evangelical. Second, there are the traditional Pentecostal denominations comprising churches such as

the Assemblies of God, Apostolic Faith Mission, and Full Gospel Church of God. Third, there are the new movements that have arisen such as the Rhema Bible churches and the various Christian Centres, plus other variants of this same thrust. In its general character South African charismatic Christianity may be said to be fundamentalist in type. Its strongly literalistic bible teaching and apocalyptic eschatology along with its world denying characteristics confirm this. This is interesting in view of the fact that much of the American fundamentalist establishment is characterized by its repudiation of charismatic Christianity.

Recently there have been signs of a stirring of social awareness and movement towards social action particularly among black charismatics in South Africa. This is reflected in the publication of the Relevant Pentecostal Witness document.

(4) In Fundamentalist Evangelicalism the twin elements of a reactionary character and a Protestant scholasticism combine with an aggressive evangelistic zeal to form a movement with great potential for growth and influence, especially among people searching for certainty and straightforward answers in a complex and bewildering world. This factor in the popularity of fundamentalism was recorded in the 1972 publication by Dean M Kelley, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing.* These inclinations have certainly not subsided. Increased complexity, confusion, and conflict in society appear to have created a climate favourable for the growth of such right-wing religion, not least in South Africa. Some have justifiably seen this kind of faith as a form of escapism from the realities of life, while for others it appears to offer a refuge from the pressures of the world. In my view the fundamentalist form of faith lacks credibility, not only because of its world denying characteristics, but also because of its implicit support of state oppression under the guise of an a-political spirituality.

(5) In Conservative Evangelicalism, sometimes called "Establishment Evangelicalism", or "Mainline Evangelicalism", we discern the predominant form of evangelicalism. It is predominant in the sense

that it is this form which is most commonly in view when the term "evangelical" is used on its own. For many, "conservative evangelical" and "evangelical" are synonymous terms, while other variants are considered less than evangelical. It is also somewhat confusingly referred to as "New Evangelicalism", or "Neo-Evangelicalism", (terms sometimes used interchangably but sometimes distinguished), which depict the movement which first self-consciously defined itself over against fundamentalism, but also which have been used to describe the evangelicals of the left. The heart of this form of evangelicalism lies in its biblically oriented doctrine of the grace of God to sinful persons and its resulting concern for mission and evangelism. The adjective conservative is primarily theologically conceived as the conservation of the "faith once delivered to the saints", over against liberal theology which is seen as adapting unchangeable truth.

It is within this broader context as one of various forms of evangelicalism that radical evangelism is seen in this thesis. In saying this I do not suggest that its evangelical validity depends on it conforming to interpretative models or cultural expressions which any other form may seek to impose. Any such imperialistic notions need to be resisted. Rather it is one among other forms of evangelicalism in that it reflects an understanding of evangelical faith in a formulation that is both true to the essence of that faith and relevant to the concerns which motivate its expression.

It is also true however, that it is particularly in relationship to conservative evangelicalism that a radical evangelical understanding of the poor will be seen in this thesis. This is because in historical terms radical evangelicalism (mainly expressed in third world contexts) has emerged from the missionary endeavours of the mainline community. This attention also stems however from the fact that it is conservative evangelicalism which more than any other form is seen to represent evangelicalism. It is the high profile image which projects what evangelicalism is all about. It is the presence of certain features in this image which are seen to deny human wholeness and inhibit the liberation of oppressed people

which calls for the alternative evangelical formulation that this thesis attempts.

3. Issues in Formulation

It has been suggested that evangelical faith can be represented in four characteristics expressed in the words, authority, grace, conversion and discipleship. This is my formulation suggested by that of Orlando Costas. I believe it would be acceptable to most evangelicals, at least in terms of agreement that the items included truly reflect evangelical faith. Obviously the formulation of these items could vary enormously, they are often interpreted differently, and some would regard them as too generalized a description and call for the addition of further items and more specific definition. All this points to the fact that while it is possible to describe evangelicalism in general terms and express a degree of consensus, there are live issues of formulation and emphasis which affect the perspective from which evangelicalism is seen.

It is necessary, I believe, to discuss these issues because too often one part of the evangelical tradition is portrayed as synonymous with the whole of evangelicalism. The identification of conservative evangelicalism with its stress on the Protestant Reformation as the norm by which evangelicalism is measured makes the fatal error of confusing a dominant formulation of evangelical faith with that faith itself and in so doing denies the validity of other formulations. In this section I focus on some issues in the formulation of evangelical faith and argue that one particular formulation (such as conservative evangelicalism) cannot be equated with evangelicalism as such. To do this is to deny other streams within the history of the evangelical movement and also, as has often happened, to impose one particular Western formulation on the whole movement whose centre of gravity is increasingly shifting towards the third world. In addition, there are aspects of the dominant conservative tradition which, as we have already noted,

adversely affect evangelicalism's role in society. In such formulations, controlled by conservative presuppositions, a form of evangelicalism appears which, I believe, is incapable of functioning as a truly liberating force in contexts of social oppression. It is my contention that without a theology rooted in the concerns of the oppressed-poor evangelicalism cannot be a truly relevant and empowering force where people suffer as victims of the rich and powerful.

3.1. Fundamentalism and Conservatism

The issue here concerns the inter-relationship between evangelicalism, fundamentalism, and conservative evangelicalism. My underlying concern in this section is the imposition of fundamentalist and conservative norms on evangelicalism as such and the assumption that these represent the essence of evangelical faith.

David Moberg has said that "one of the troublesome aspects of identifying and describing evangelicalism is how to differentiate it from fundamentalism" (1977:164). There is considerable overlap between the two terms and they clearly have close connections. James Barr maintains that the term "evangelical" is misused by those who wish to escape the pejorative connotations of the word "fundamentalist". He uses "fundamentalist" to describe those who prefer to call themselves "evangelical" (1977:xix). Notwithstanding close ties which prompt such identification, the distinctions between evangelicalism and fundamentalism are sufficiently significant, I believe, to maintain that they are not synonymous terms.

The task of relating them is further complicated by the fact that fundamentalism is differently understood in various parts of the world. In Britain it has had more positive connotations (relating to a professed adherence to the fundamentals of the faith) than in America where it often has sharper and more militant associations. Referring to the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1920s Marsden says of English conservatism: "it differed sig-

nificantly from the American variety in its general lack of militance and impact on the culture" (1980:222). While there are variations between the more militant and open forms of fundamentalism there is no mistaking the universal connotations associating the term with a strongly conservative and dogmatic form of Christianity. To understand this fundamentalist ethos and its relationship to evangelicalism some details of its history need to be considered.

George M. Marsden has traced the development of modern concepts of evangelicalism and fundamentalism in a brief historical survey. He points to the existence of the nineteenth century transdenominational, trans-Atlantic evangelical fellowship which was unified mainly by the desire to win the world for Christ. The early decades of the twentieth century saw this basis modified, though not abandoned, in the crises surrounding the conflicts between "fundamentalists" and "modernists" in the formerly evangelical bodies. "Fundamentalists were especially militant evangelicals who battled against the modernists' accommodations of the gospel message to modern intellectual and cultural trends" (1984:xii). In reaction to the toleration of modernism by the leadership of the major northern denominations in the USA a new fundamentalist coalition emerged as the dominant factor in the conservative evangelical fellowship. In its struggle to survive, evangelicalism took on a fundamentalistic tone characterized by negativism and fear.

According to Marsden a complicating factor was the prominence of dispensationalist premillennialists in positions of leadership in interdenominational fundamentalism. Their prophetic interpretations predicting apostasy in the church justified independence from established denominations. He writes:

> Accordingly, they had already built a formidable network of evangelistic organizations, mission agencies, and Bible schools. Their transdenominational orientation and their evangelistic aggressiveness, together with a hard-line militance against any concessions to modernism, put them in a position to marshall, or at least to influence, many of the conservative evangelical forces. During the 1920s leaders of this movement presumed to speak for all

> fundamentalists and did coordinate many fundamentalist efforts. They thus developed a disproportionate influence among conservatives in the old interdenominational evangelical movement, which during the next three decades was generally known as `fundamentalist'" (1984:xiii).

After 1940 the heirs of this dispensationalist-fundamentalist movement were involved in a renewal of the more open branches of fundamentalism. It was out of this broadening move that what for a time was known as "neo-evangelicalism" emerged, preserving many of the positive emphases of the old nineteenth-century coalition but also some of the fundamentalist negativism.

Marsden points to the influence of Billy Graham in this new movement. For two decades after 1950 this narrowly self-conscious evangelicalism was marked by Graham's prominence and by the leadership of former fundamentalists in organizing this neo-evangelical movement. These factors however "partially obscured for a time the fact that the movement, even as a conscious community, had many other foci and included many other traditions" (1984:xiii). Since the 1960s and into the 1970s the diversities always present in the old evangelical fellowship have come to the fore and precipitated in the 1980s the identity crisis evidenced by debates over "who is an evangelical" (1984:xiii)?

This material taken from Marsden pictures fundamentalism as a movement within evangelicalism which emerged in response to modernism, for a time became dominant and representative of evangelicalism, but with the emergence of neo-evangelicalism assumed a separate identity. "By the end of the 1950s the term `fundamentalism' had come to be applied most often to strict separatists, mostly dispensationalists, who were unhappy with the compromises of the new `evangelical' coalition of Billy Graham" (1984:xiv).

Despite the separate identity of neo-evangelicalism from fundamentaism, there are certain fundamentalist traits which persist in the conservative evangelical community.6 It is the persistence of such traits which I believe play a large role in inhibiting the develop-

ment of a liberating social theology in conservative evangelicalism. In the following listing of some of these persistent characteristics something of the fundamentalist face of evangelicalism will be portrayed. While this portrayal certainly does not provide a complete picture, it is true enough to suggest that the continued existence of this side of the evangelical character is cause for concern and a challenge to theological and social renewal.

(1) Fundamentalists are characterized by separatist and schismatic attitudes, and whereas this is less pronounced in evangelicals something of this same defensive mentality still appears in the mainline community particularly when it is thought that "the faith" is being threatened. This is exemplified in the strong apologetic tone that sometimes appears in conservative evangelical statements and the tendency to easily suspect the Christian credentials of non-evangelical believers. I see part of the problem here with the way in which a legitimate desire for the assurance of faith can be perverted into an absolutist mentality in which little flexibility exists. While I do not deny either the necessity or possibility of assurance, I suggest that the ways in which this is pursued often involve the development of dogmatic and exclusivist characteristics which adversely affect the evangelical character and make it unable to fulfill a meaningful social role.

One of the characteristics of radical evangelicalism is that in contrast to these separatist and defensive stances of fundamentalism-conservatism it displays a greater openness in relationship to ecumenicals and liberals. Richard Mouw has said: "We evangelicals have often been suspicious and unfriendly people in our relationships with other groups in the larger Christian community" (1987:337). This is reflected by Orlando Costas in his appraisal of the responses of evangelicals, particularly Peter Beyerhaus, at the World Council of Churches 1973 Bangkok Conference:

> Perhaps one of the greatest tragedies reflected at Bangkok is the incapacity of some evangelicals to participate wisely and positively, not polemically, in pluralistic

> ecclesiastical meetings. At the bottom, the reaction of so many evangelicals to the main thrust of Bangkok shows a hermeneutical crisis, i.e. a refusal to interpret people in the light of their own terms, experiences, and categories (1974:296-297).

It is one of the strengths of radical evangelicals that they consciously seek to overcome these perceived weaknesses of the evangelical establishment, and without altering their own commitments pursue a wider fellowship in the vision of a broader Christian unity. In this way they seek to provide an alternative model to that of isolationism and suspicion of non-evangelical Christians which is often a major mark of more conservative evangelicals. In a South African context the gap between evangelicals and ecumenicals is exacerbated by the polarities produced by the apartheid system through which divisions are widened and suspicion intensified. This relates especially to the way in which many evangelicals view the SACC. In the confrontation between church and state, there is a need for evangelicals to learn appreciation of the Christian motivation and integrity of those ecumenicals who stand in the forefront of the struggle against oppression. In this confrontation between church and state it is often evangelicals who together with fundamentalists side with the forces of power and authority in their sustained attacks on those segments of the church which prophetically call for justice. Radical evangelicals have to some degree stood in welcome contrast to this tendency. In April 1988 when State President P.W. Botha was engaged in well publicized attacks on church leaders a group of Concerned Evangelicals meeting in Pietermaritzburg issued a statement which was sent to the State President as well as the leaders he was attacking, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Revs. Allan Boesak and Frank Chikane. This read:

> At a meeting held on Wednesday 13th April 1988 at Ubunye House, Pietermaritzburg we, a group of concerned evangelicals, unanimously decided to affirm our support for and solidarity with the leaders of the church as represented in the persons of Rev. Allan Boesak, Rev. Frank Chikane and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in the stand they have recently made concerning Christian witness in the present South African context.

> We support this courageous stand and encourage them to continue prayerfully and in the spirit of Christ to lead the church into obedience to its head during these crucial times in the history of our nation.
>
> We believe that this is the time for the prophetic voice of the church to be heard with clarity and without ambiguity in faithfulness to the gospel. We believe also that it is urgent that the government heed their council (sic), since it is our conviction that they represent the feelings of the majority in our nation, at this time. We would like them to be assured of our prayers.

(2) Another fundamentalist trait (closely related to the previous point) which sometimes appears among conservative evangelicals is its reactionary character. This factor may legitimately be regarded as one of the basic marks of the fundamentalist spirit. Marsden has argued that the key distinguishing factor of the American fundamentalism of 1870-1925 was its militancy in the face of modernism. This rather than doctrinal concerns or missions and evangelism is what set it apart as "fundamentalist", though these other concerns are rightly considered central traits of fundamentalism (1980:231). He speaks of fundamentalism as: "a loose, diverse, and changing federation of co-belligerents united by their fierce opposition to modernist attempts to bring Christianity into line with modern thought" (1980:4). Marsden sees the fundamentalist experience of the 1920s as a "major factor in shaping twentieth-century evangelicalism; though...evangelicalism is an older tradition that has been shaped by many other factors" (1980:5). The significance of Marsden's analysis is that it indicates a form of historical conditioning in evangelicalism which predisposes it, despite other influences, to a form of reactionary conservatism which makes it ultra sensitive to what it perceives as threats to the faith. Marsden has pointed to the disposition in fundamentalist thought to conceive all kinds of conspiracies mounted against the church which call for a defensive watchfulness in protecting it against attack (1980:210-211).

One modern example of such defensiveness is the concern of fundamentalist-conservatives with the New Age movement. This was

publicized through events in Cape Town in November 1989 when New Ager planting of two peace poles was vigorously opposed by fundamentalist Christians. Such Christians "physically confronted the New Agers and pole planters, praying passionately to drive away 'the spirit of Satan'" (Cross Times 1989:11). This passionate opposition, accompanied sometimes by antagonism of the worst kind ("The New Ager gong player received a death threat"), is fuelled by a conservative theology which sees in a movement like New Age a Satanic conspiracy aimed at the overthrow of the Christian faith. One Cape Town pastor speaks of it as "a vast and powerful movement penetrating our politics, religion, education and ecology, and it is preparing the platform for the coming of the anti-Christ" (Cross Times 1989:13). While it appears obvious that the New Age approach challenges certain key aspects of the orthodox Christian tradition it seems to me that opposition to New Age has become something of an obsession with conservative Christians. Thus the focus on this kind of threat with all its accompanying "war of words" serves to only further distract evangelical attention from the fundamental issue concerning the situation of those who are the victims of the system in this country. Needless to say, the New Age movement is an issue of white not black South African evangelicalism.

(3) Another characteristic of fundamentalism-evangelicalism is its social conservatism. There is little doubt that evangelicals like their fundamentalist counterparts tend to be socially and politically conservative. An American sociological investigation reported by Milton Rokeach in 1969 strongly criticized the social influences of organized religion, whose conclusions summarized by David Moberg, stated:

> The general picture that emerges from the results presented...is that those who place a high value on salvation are conservative, anxious to maintain the status quo, and unsympathetic or indifferent to the plight of the black or the poor....Considered all together, the data suggest a portrait of the religious-minded as a person having a self-centred preoccupation with saving his own soul, an other-worldly orientation, coupled with an indifference toward or even a tacit endorsement of a so-

> cial system that would perpetuate social inequality and injustice (Stott 1984:8).

Moberg tells of the storm of protest brought about by this report and allegations that the research methodology was faulty, but comments that ignoring these findings "would be a serious mistake" (Stott 1984:8).

(4) A further fundamentalist characteristic that appears in evangelicalism lies in what might be called its "eschatological escapism". By this I mean the strong emphasis on predictive prophecy, particularly of a pre-millennial and often dispensational type, which is used as a means of escaping the responsibility to work for a better world.

The pre-millennial scheme which looks to the establishment of God's kingdom on earth following the "second coming" of Christ effectively reduces incentive to work for social transformation. It sees the world (in fulfillment of prophecy) as getting worse and the only hope as Christ's return when all will be set right. I grew up under the influence of this concept and can clearly remember being taught, "you don't polish the brass on a sinking ship". The implications of this idea were crystal clear. This world is a doomed ship, the Christian's job is to rescue survivors, to try to save the ship is a waste of time and a distraction from the urgent rescue mission. This kind of reasoning provides a perfect means for evangelicals to escape from the disturbing responsibilities of the present world; since deterioration is prophesied for this age, and real betterment can only come in the next age, let us live to rescue souls for the future and leave the present world to its sad and inevitable destiny.

In fairness it needs to be said that not all evangelicals are pre-millennialists, not all pre-millennialists carry through the implications of this philosophy, neither do all adhere to those forms of it which most distinctly have this effect. It is, however, disturbing to note that in our age of social upheaval there is an up-

surge of apocalypticism among evangelicals which provides them with an escape from the present into the future. South African evangelicals have, along with others, come under the spell of an author like Hal Lindsey (*The Late Great Planet Earth*) whose books have sold over 30 million copies. Lindsey approvingly quotes a pastor who said: "God didn't send me down here to clean up the fish bowl but to fish in it" (Kuzmic 1985:146). It is this kind of mentality which epitomizes the approach of those whose eschatology has an essentially escapist function because it allows them to ignore the injustices of the present by focussing on the supreme need to prepare for an eternal future. This theology gains credibility among conservatives by its neglect of the biblical emphasis on the kingdom as a central aspect of the gospel which refers to life in society here and now.

These four characteristics indicate the continuing influence of fundamentalism on evangelicalism. They are an issue for our consideration of evangelical formulation because all of them orient theology away from that perspective in which the concerns of the poor are a significant factor for Christian understanding. Therefore the form of evangelical theology being developed in this thesis will attempt to move away from such categories of understanding, and as an alternative formulate its evangelicalism in a shape more able to meet the needs of oppressed people from a radical-liberative perspective rather than a fundamentalist-conservative one. By taking this direction the affirmation is made that evangelical theology need not be "conservative evangelical" theology, at least not in the form in which this often appears.

3.2. Influence of Protestant Scholasticism

Another issue in evangelical formulation concerns the way in which Protestant scholasticism has influenced the definition of evangelicalism. This has often led to an identification of evangelicalism with one narrow aspect of its Protestant Reformation

tradition and produced certain stereotypes which have excluded other more liberative evangelical traditions.

3.2.1. Nature of Protestant Scholasticism

Scholasticism in Protestant history is the form of thinking which took the living truths of Reformation doctrine and encased them in rigid and strictly applied systems of dogma. It is a system of static formulation which codifies doctrinal truth into clearly stated propositions and calls for unhesitating assent to these propositions. This is a factor clearly present in fundamentalist thinking and also evident (if in a less pronounced way) in much of conservative evangelicalism. Marsden, who does not use the expression, nevertheless emphasises this approach to understanding in his reference to the influence of "Baconian common sense philosophy". He writes that fundamentalists were

> ...steadfastly committed to the principles of the seventeenth-century philosopher Francis Bacon: careful observation and classification of facts. These principles were wedded to a "common sense" philosophy that affirmed the ability to apprehend the facts clearly, whether the facts of nature or even more clearly certain facts of Scripture. This philosophy, essentially the "Scottish Common Sense Realism"...that had dominated mid-nineteenth-century America, was the basis of much of the unity in fundamentalist thought (1980:7).

Marsden sees this approach both in dispensationalism (with its tendency to divide and classify ages in a prophetic scheme), and in Princeton theology (Old School Presbyterianism which viewed truth essentially as "precisely stated propositions") (1980:110). In this view of the coming together of two, in many ways dissimilar groups to provide a unified form of fundamentalist thought, Marsden agrees with Sandeen who proposes that: "Fundamentalism was comprised of an alliance between two newly-formulated nineteenth century theologies, dispensationalism and the Princeton Theology which, though not wholly compatible, managed to maintain a united

front against Modernism until about 1918" (1968:3). The common factor perceived by both Marsden (although he also stresses the importance of other streams such as revivalism and pietism feeding into fundamentalism) and Sandeen in the meeting of these two to create the fundamentalist-type ethos is what we may well call "Protestant scholasticism".

The significance of this kind of scholasticism is that it defines evangelicalism primarily in terms of rigidly defined doctrinal formulations. According to Stevick such "Protestant scholasticism.... is an authoritarian thought-scheme" in which the bible is primarily a "body of propositions" and theology is the work of organizing and arranging these into a full and orderly scheme (1964:55). This static view of theology is expressed in the words of Charles Hodge, a major representative of Princeton theology, at the semicentennial celebration of his association with Princeton Seminary: "I am not afraid to say that a new idea never originated in this seminary" (Dayton 1976:129). In this scheme the human formulation of truth is seen to be derived directly from the bible itself and therefore interpretation tends to become authoritative and must be defended at all costs. This gives fundamentalism its dogmatically defensive character.

This fundamentalist propensity shifts the centre of gravity in evangelicalism from the desire faithfully to expound and proclaim the gospel to the urge to defensively guard forms in which the gospel has been expressed. Stevick speaks of the theory of verbal inspiration as "the electric fence around the Fundamentalist pasture" (1964:81). Irrespective of the validity or otherwise of verbal inspiration, the analogy is apt. Fundamentalist scholasticism is marked by its erection of barriers around its traditional formulations. In this there is often blindness to the degree to which these formulations are sociologically conditioned, and confusion between the humanly expressed interpretation and the divinely given Word. The problem with this kind of fundamentalism is that it posits a way of doing theology which is bound not only to tradtional formulations but also to the traditionally scholastic meth-

odology, the organized arrangement of a body of propositions plainly spelled out in a text book called the bible. It is from the stultifying effect of this kind of fundamentalism that evangelicalism needs to escape. A radical evangelical theology which focuses on the situation of the poor moves in a diametrically opposite direction to such preoccupation with defensive formulations. It concerns itself mainly with the liberation of people in all aspects of their human existence rather than with the protection of systems of doctrine seen to be under attack.

At the heart of this critique of Protestant scholasticism lies the objection to the way it exalts Western methods of reasoning and invests them with a divine sanction. In today's world it represents a triumphalistic approach which ignores contextual and third world traditions and claims universal validity for its own formulations. In my view this involves a form of cultural imperialism which distorts the true meaning of evangelicalism.

An example of such cultural imperialism is evident in the response of A.H. Jeffree James to the EWISA document in which he dismisses the authors as not truly evangelical because they do not conform to that form of evangelicalism he regards as normative: "the authors can hardly claim to be Evangelicals in the historic or theological meaning of that term" (1987:7). The implication behind this statement is that the theology of evangelicalism is determined by formulations which arose from the Protestant Reformation, formulations reflecting contexts vastly different from those in which modern third world evangelicals seek to do their theology. To speak in these terms is to impose a theological method which is distinctly "Western" on third world cultures and to claim that all evangelical theology must conform to this pattern. While the essential affirmations of the Reformation regarding grace and faith are reflected in the perspectives of the EWISA authors, it is a different matter to set up a Reformed-type theological expression as the standard by which to measure evangelicalism. In this I see an example of a kind of Protestant or Calvinistic scholasticism which tri-

umphalistically exalts one form of theological discourse and makes this normative for evangelicalism.

In reflecting on the nature of "Calvinistic scholasticism" and considering its effects on theological ethics John Howard Yoder has said:

> It (Calvinistic scholasticism) is marked by a high degree of confidence both in the tools of rational argument, and in the belief that terms can be defined rigorously and manipulated by strict logic so as to deliver irresistible demonstrations. Christians in other parts of the world have no commitment to the priority of that kind of argumentation....The more we insist that our modern, specifically European (in fact educated North European) pattern of rationality must be used, the less we shall be able to contribute to authentic ethical discernment in cultures whose modes of discourse, communicate and can be evaluated only with the use of other styles, where fables or hero stories, proverbs or parables are used.
>
> Our reasoning processes need to change not only by renouncing the sovereignty of a scholastic method of thought but also by taking account of the social context in which theological ethics is done....Theologians who do not take account of their own social location and interests, especially if these do not correspond to God's preferential option for the poor, are in effect captives. This is true not only in the sense that we are always limited by our own perceptions and languages, but also that we are not in the right posture to be able to reflect ethically from the perspective of Jesus (1985:30).

3.2.2. Princeton Calvinism

In his work *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* Donald Dayton has traced something of the history of Protestant scholasticism, particularly as it was expressed in the Princeton Calvinism of the nineteenth century. This tradition is important because it has had a very significant impact on evangelicalism and is regarded by many conservatives as the epitome of theological orthodoxy. Dayton has pointed to the way in which John Gerstner equates evangelicalism with the Princeton school which he sees as "the nineteenth century standard-bearer of evangelical orthodoxy". The revivalist Charles

Finney, on the contray, is regarded by Gerstner as "the greatest of nineteenth-century foes of evangelicalism" (1976:138).

In his analysis of Princeton Calvinism Dayton points to three major ways in which this form of Protestant scholasticism has influenced the thinking of evangelicals.

(1) Princeton Calvinism in the words of Dayton "incarnated extremely conservative social views" (1976:129). This is exemplified in the theology of Charles Hodge who contended that the church should be a conservative force in society. "Of the Presbyterian church he commented in 1861 that `we have preserved the integrity and unity of the Church, made it the great conservative body of truth, moderation and liberty of conscience in our country'" (1976:129).

This conservative position espoused by Hodge and the Princeton school included taking a firm stand against abolitionists like Finney. "Hodge was disturbed by the abolitionist attack on so basic a structure of American society as slavery, insisting that Christianity was never `designed to tear up the institutions of society by its roots'" (1976:129). He attacked the abolitionists saying that their fundamental principle that slaveholding was sinful was unscriptural. In Hodge's view "both political despotism and domestic slavery, belong in morals to the *adiaphora*, to things indifferent". While he insisted that slaveholders hold to biblical norms which moderate the effects of slavery, and while when emancipation eventually came, he supported it, his position in the antislavery struggle clearly was one which opposed abolitionism and his writings were used to defend slavery as such (1976:129-130).

These are perspectives reflected also in the writings of Sydney Ahlstrom and Timothy Smith. Ahlstrom has noted that three facts rallied support for slavery in opposition to the abolitionist crusade. They were; the Virginia slave revolt of 1831, censorship of antislavery literature, and the development of scriptural arguments in support of slavery (1972:653-654). In the last of these Southern Christians were joined by Old School Calvinists in using the bible to support slavery. Smith writes of the way in which the

conservatives of the Presbyterian Church linked abolitionism to Arminianism and asserted "that revivalism, fanaticism, and reform went hand in hand". This justification of the system was centred in Princeton Theological Seminary whose brand of Calvinist theology linked their struggle for theological orthodoxy with social conservatism, in this case support of slavery. Smith continues:

> Princeton professors joined Southern preachers in working out a maddeningly ingenious defense of slavery....God had chosen some to be masters and some to be servants...in much the same way as certain men were elected to be saved and others to be damned. The Scriptures revealed this divine sanction of slavery - the Old Testament by precept and example and the New Testament by its silence. The apostles had not thought the church "a moral institute of universal good" but a channel of personal salvation, a doorway to everlasting life (1976:185-186).

Smith later notes the way in which anti-slavery evangelicals such as Albert Barnes used biblical arguments against the institution and spoke of the bible as an "instrument of reform". These contrasted with the conservative use of the bible as "a shield against social innovation" (1976:216-219).

The effects of this kind of socially conservative tradition which supports oppressive institutions and uses the bible as an instrument to this end is part of the scholastic heritage of evangelicals and still influential among them, not least in South Africa. It is obvious that any evangelical theology which aims to be relevant to the needs of the oppressed of the third world must distance itself from this form of Calvinistic theology and seek alternative formulations for its evangelical commitments.

(2) A second way in which Princeton Calvinism has influenced evangelical theology is through the clearly hierarchical categories through which its theology is formulated. This form of what may be termed a "top down" theology emphasizes structures of authority and obedience in society, the family and the church. One of its effects was opposition to the women's movement.

> Hodge and the Princeton school also opposed the women's movement that emerged from abolitionism. Hodge argued

> that "females and minors are judged (though for different reasons), incompetent to the proper discharge of the duties of citizenship"....Princeton theologians ... opposed suffrage, arguing that the idea of two autonomous votes in a single household was irreconcilable with the biblical doctrine of the headship of the husband (Dayton 1976:130).

It is noteworthy that modern day opponents of women's ordination are happy to follow the arguments of their Princeton forebears when it comes to forbidding women to exercise leadership in the church, but they are unprepared (to my knowledge) to consistently follow this argument of male headship to its logical conclusion by advocating that women should be barred from exercising full citizenship.

According to Dayton this hierarchical structuring of theology was related to social conditioning for, in contrast to Finney's theology, "the Princeton Theology was more closely tied to the aristocracy and higher social classes" (1976:130). An undoubted contributer to this elitist tendency was the "determinism" which characterized the "Old School Calvinism".

> In affirming determinism, Hodge tended to argue that everything is done according to God's good purposes, and that whatever our position in life, we ought not to resist it, but find what good God wishes to work in that situation. In this view poverty becomes not only an unfortunate situation out of which God is able to bring good, but even more a result of direct determination of God not to be resisted. Such a position not only supports the status quo but gives it a divine endorsement (1976:131).

It is part of the purpose of this thesis to propose a needed alternative to these hierarchical categories of understanding too prevalent within the evangelical tradition. Any theology which attempts to argue from the perspective of the poor must of necessity dissociate itself from such oppressive and dehumanizing perspectives. In the fourth chapter of this thesis the alternative to this form of Calvinism will be proposed in a theology which is formulated from the perspective of those on the underside of history.

(3) Another respect in which Princeton Calvinism has influenced evangelicalism is in the area of its emphasis on human depravity with its accompanying social pessimism.

> The Princeton theologians were deeply impressed by the presence of sin in the world. Hodge, for example, maintained that one implication of human depravity is that "no man , no community of men, no society, church or nation ever suffered in this life as much as their sins deserve. And, consequently, no individual or nation can ever justly complain of the dispensation of divine providence as unmerited inflictions" (Dayton 1976:131).

This emphasis was accompanied by the idea that divine grace does not in this life fully overcome sin and therefore the fallen state of humankind and the effects of sin constitute a normal condition in this life. In contrast, Finney placed more emphasis on the power of God's grace to effectively remedy the sinful situation here on earth. An example of this contrast was the approach to the women's issue. "Princeton theologians, deeply conscious of the impact of sin, tended to focus on the curse in the Genesis narrative of the Fall, arguing that the subordination of women in that passage provided a universal principle normative for all human life this side of the grave". On the other hand Finney and the Oberlinites saw "the curse as descriptive of the sinful state out of which redemption is to be effected" (Dayton 1976:131-132).

Dayton comments that this distinction gave to Finney and his followers the

> ...utopian edge necessary for a theology to support major social change. The importance of this theologically grounded utopianism has again become clear in recent discussions between the South American theologies of liberation and the school of Christian Realism that has dominated much recent American theology. Christian Realists find the liberation theologians' use of utopianism visionary and unrealistic. The Latin American theologians reply that without this theme the positions of the Christian Realists become in effect "ideologies of the establishment". By analogy, Hodge was in his time a very conservative "Christian Realist" whose theology served as an "ideology of the establishment". Though accused of perfectionism by the Princeton theologians, Finney and his followers found in the doctrine of redemption the utopian

> vision that enabled them to press toward a society free of slavery and the subordination of women (1976:132).

There is little doubt in my view that the kind of emphasis on depravity inherited from theologians like Hodge has an extremely harmful impact on evangelical social theology. I see it as one of the main contributors to that very conservative form of South African evangelicalism which, arising out of a Protestant history strongly influenced by forms of Calvinist theology serving as an "ideology of the establishment", has played no small part in the production of the apartheid society.

This three-fold influence of social conservatism, hierarchical understanding and the focus on depravity is not some distant nineteenth century emphasis unrelated to the present struggle to define evangelicalism. On the contrary, these are live issues whose propagation in the name of biblical evangelicalism deeply affects the quality of human life experienced by multitudes of people. I suggest that where such Protestant scholastic emphases are allowed to determine evangelical identity they produce a form of Christianity which not only serves to entrench socially oppressive systems but also has a decidedly dehumanizing effect, especially on the weak and disadvantaged. A radical evangelical theology of the poor in contrast is a theology which consciously endeavours to be liberated from such elements.

I believe it needs to be affirmed as strongly as possible that evangelicalism has another liberating tradition which more truly represents its fundamental characteristic as a witness to God's grace as redemptive action in the midst of human need and misery. Summarizing the way in which Protestant scholasticism and similar conservative tendencies have robbed evangelicalism of its true heritage Donald Dayton has said:

> In the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy and in succeeding decades, the sociological, theological, and historical currents produced a movement that in many ways stood for the opposite of what an earlier generation of Evangelicals had affirmed. What had begun as a Christian egalitarianism was transformed into a type of Christian

> elitism. Revivalist currents that had once been bent to the liberation of the slave now allied themselves with wealth and power against the civil rights movement. Churches and movements that had pioneered a new role for women became the most resistant to contemporary movements seeking the same goals (1976:134).

3.3 Authority of Scripture

Another issue in identifying evangelicalism concerns the ways in which the authority of scripture is conceived and formulated. The issues of fundamentalism-conservatism and Protestant scholasticism already discussed directly affect this issue. Western evangelical theologians influenced by the tendencies already described have made the formulation and defense of clearly enunciated theories of biblical authority a key issue for evangelical understanding. On the other hand evangelicals from third world contexts and those representing the pietist tradition are more concerned about the function of biblical authority than its precise definition. The issue does not concern authority as such. This is a universally accepted element of evangelical identity. The issue concerns how this authority is perceived and the insistence of conservatives that evangelical identity is determined by adherence to biblical authority in terms which they define.

In radical evangelical theology the concern lies more with the content of scripture and its function as a directive for life than with definition of this authority. This is illustrated in an exchange between Jim Wallis and Carl Henry in the pages of *Christianity Today* in 1974. In an appraisal of Quebedeaux's book, *The Young Evangelicals* Carl Henry isolates three distinguishing marks of the young evangelicals as he sees them depicted by Quebedeaux. These are:

> (1) a reconstruction of the traditional evangelical view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture; (2) a special interest in Scripture 'as a basis for action in the world' (p.98), that is for evangelism relevant to the whole man; and (3) over against the fundamentalist code, a restatement of moral values involved in discipleship (1974:6)

Responding to Henry's appraisal of *The Young Evangelicals*, Jim Wallis replied:

> Henry implies throughout his essay that the young evangelicals are characterized by a deteriorating view of Scripture. On the contrary, the new evangelical consciousness is most characterized by a return to biblical Christianity and the desire to apply fresh biblical insights to the need for new forms of socio-political engagement. Young evangelicals, just like 'establishment evangelicalism,' have differing views as to the meaning and extent of inerrancy and infallibility, but clearly accept the orthodox belief in the authority and inspiration of Scripture. In fact, I would contend that much of this new evangelical consciousness takes Scripture more seriously than many evangelicals who accept the authority of Scripture doctrinally but balk at some of the more exacting biblical demands in relation to social justice and to their style of life (1974::20).

This emphasis on the central importance of regard for the exacting demands of scripture is also expressed in the assessment of Quebedeaux when he says:

> ...although the evangelical left has no uniform theological stance, it does display certain dominant trends. The evangelical left stresses the functional power of the Bible to transform individuals and their social structures over the traditional evangelical understanding of Scripture as the depository of divine revelation and propositional truth in words alone (1978:98).

These observations indicate the orientation of radical evangelicalism's biblical concern. They also imply that in the issue of identifying the meaning of "evangelical" radical evangelical concern lies more with evangelical obedience than with adherence to formulations concerning the nature of biblical authority. Thomas Hanks has expressed this concern when reflecting on the third world approach to the question of scripture. He says: "we have come to view the 'crisis of authority' lamented by First World theologians in a very different light. We see it not as a crisis of authority, but rather as a kind of 'crisis of hearing' (a failure repeatedly diagnosed in both Old and New Testaments)" (1983:67). These words of Hanks reflect a perspective in which concern focuses primarily

on the fact that a major aspect of biblical teaching (God's preferential option for the poor) is consistently overlooked by conservative evangelicals in their preoccupation with questions of definition. Therefore emphasis should rest more on what the bible teaches than on how its authority is formulated.

James Cone has expressed a similar perspective in writing of the attitude of American black people to the bible.

> Theology derived from the moans and shouts of oppressed black people defines a different set of problems than those found in the white theological textbooks. Instead of asking whether the Bible is infallible, black people want to know whether it is real - that is, whether the God to which it bears witness is present in their struggle (1986:11).

Writing in an earlier work Cone reflects on the confidence black people have in the bible.

> Black people in America had great confidence in the holy Book. This confidence has not been shaken by the rise of historical criticism....This does not mean that black people are fundamentalists in the strict sense of the term. They have not been preoccupied with definitions of inspiration and infallibility. Accordingly their confidence in the Book has not been so brittle or contentious as that of white conservatives. It is as if blacks have intuitively drawn the all important distinction between infallibility and reliability. They have not contended for a fully explicit infallibility, feeling perhaps that there is a mystery in the Book, as there is in the Christ. What they have testified to is the Book's reliability: how it is the true and basic source for discovering the truth of Jesus Christ. For this reason there has been no crisis of biblical authority in the black community (1975:111-112).

These remarks of Cone are significant because they point to an approach in which the bible functions authoritatively yet in which the scholastic approach is avoided. I see these two factors as important guidelines in the development of a radical evangelical theology. On the one hand it must be a genuinely biblical theology, showing its evangelicalism by the way it observes scriptural authority not just in theory but in practice. On the other, it

must discern and reject the culturally conditioned scholasticism of those who insist on adherence to precisely stated definitions of scripture as a means of identifying evangelicals. The issue, I believe, is not whether the authority of scripture is affirmed or not. It is an issue of cultural expression. At its heart lies the questioning of the right of one culturally determined formulation to dictate the identity of evangelicalism. It involves (using an earlier quoted expression from Yoder), "renouncing the sovereignty of a scholastic method of thought" (1985:30).

4. Conclusions

(1) In identifying radical evangelicalism third world contexts are of particular importance because this theology reflects the perceptions which arise from situations where oppression and poverty directly influence the understanding of faith. It is therefore affirmed that evangelicalism cannot be adequately defined without its present day expression in third world contexts influencing the ways in which it is conceived.

(2) There is an informal movement (mostly located in third world contexts and identified with third world concerns) which can be properly identified by the designation "radical evangelical". In this formulation the term "radical" is an appropriate expression of the concerns of this movement.

(3) Because of the fact that mainline evanglicalism is too often identified with structures of power and wealth and therefore that its formulations bear the marks of this conditioning, it is necessary for radical evangelicalism to formulate its theology in an "alternative" form. This alternative does not depart from the essential elements of evangelicalism as such but recasts them in forms more suited to the life situations of oppressed peoples. In essence the quest for alternative formulations is a positive endeavour to meet the needs of the growing evangelical constituency in contexts of poverty. Such formulations consciously seek to

avoid the defensive quality common in the dominant tradition for this is seen as irrelevant to third world settings.

(4) The identity of evangelicalism is not wedded to conservative type definitions which reflect the influence of Protestant scholasticism. To define evangelicalism in these terms is to engage in a form of cultural imperialism which exalts a particular form of reasoning and makes it determinative for evangelical identity. In contrast, it is affirmed that evangelicalism is best identified as that form of Christian faith which seeks to effectively represent God's grace actively present in redemptive power in the midst of human need and misery. The formulations of its basic characteristics will vary according to the needs of the contexts in which they are made, granted the existence of universally accepted principles such as biblical authority, divine grace, the experience of conversion and Christian discipleship.

(5) The pattern of evangelical theology with most potential to serve the needs of third world peoples is that which reflects a pietist rather than strict Calvinist tradition. While this is a generalized statement not intended to deny the positive aspects of the whole Reformation tradition it does assert that the traditionally more abstract emphases on the "reasonableness of faith" which dominate Western thinking are inappropriate in the growing evangelicalism of todays' third world. In this context it is the effectiveness of such faith's formulations in the life situations encountered by such people which is the crucial issue to be addressed.

Writing concerning the kind of evangelical theology most appropriate in the third world Orlando Costas has said:

> I submit that the ultimate test of any theological discourse is not erudite precision but transformative power. It is a question of whether or not theology can articulate the faith in a way that is not only intellectually sound but spiritually energizing and therefore capable of leading the people of God to be transformed in their way of life and to commit themselves to God's mission in the world (1986:323).

NOTES

1 This is a document produced by a group of "Concerned Evangelicals" and issued with 132 signatories in July 1986. The outcome of a series of discussions held first in Soweto and later in the broader Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal area the document is a hard-hitting critique by evangelicals of their own theology and practise in South Africa.

2 All references to the EWISA document are based on the British edition published by Regnum Books.

3 The *Kairos Document* was produced by 150 theologians meeting in Soweto in 1985 and challenges the church by its theological comment on the political crisis in South Africa (EWISA 1986:10).

4 The term "third world is preferred to "two thirds world" in this thesis. Referring to the use of the term "third world" by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), Per Frostin has noted that this refers to the division of the globe into three parts: First World, the North Atlantic countries i.e. West Europe and North America; Second World, the Soviet bloc; Third World, Africa, Asia and Latin America. The countries of the third world share a common experience of oppression of which account should be taken in theologizing. "When we speak of Third World theologians or Third World theology, the geographical connotation is not the main point. Its full significance has to be understood in terms of the historical facts of colonial, imperialistic domination and economic exploitation of these regions by the North Atlantic and other First World powers and the consequent creation of Third-Worldness" (Frostin 1988:4). In contrast the expression two thirds world "does not emphasize the status of oppression but the fact that the peoples of these regions form a majority of the humankind" (Frostin 1988:200). Because of the connections of the term to oppression and because this is seen as more significant than the concept of numerical majority, the term "third world" is preferred to "two thirds world" in this thesis.

5 I have not included regeneration in the list because I see it belonging under both grace and conversion. Under "grace" it emphasizes God's transforming power in the life of people, under "conversion" it refers to the way this transformation is reflected in experience.

6 I prefer the designation "conservative evangelical" to the more ambiguous "new" or "neo-evangelical". Sometimes I use the term "mainline" or "establishment" evangelical, but generally I think that "conservative" is the most suitable expression. It has been used widely in a South African context where its meaning is easily understood. For example, a current advert for the Baptist Theological College of Southern Africa refers to its course as "conservative, evangelical, biblically based".

CHAPTER TWO

THE IDENTITY OF THE POOR

The concern of this thesis is to reflect on a radical evangelical understanding of the poor. In a subsequent chapter I shall attempt to establish that a commitment to the poor is a primary characteristic of radical evangelicalism. Before this is attempted however, the meaning of the term needs to be explored and clarified. To whom do we refer when we speak of "the poor"? This is the key question which will be considered in this chapter. In attempting to answer this question, biblical, theological, and sociological perspectives will be used to provide a portrait of "the poor" which will form a background for subsequent discussion.

The theology of the poor being developed in this thesis is called "radical evangelical". In its formulation this theology seeks to remain in harmony with the insights characterizing this movement. This orientation and the evangelical commitments which accompany it do not, however, imply a restriction in the use of sources to those reflecting these perspectives. In the attempt to define the poor in this chapter both radical evangelical and other sources will be used. I see this as a reflection of the openness and desire to learn from other traditions which is a mark of this form of evangelicalism. Thus the primary task of this chapter is to arrive at a definition of the poor which will harmonize with and be useful for a radical evangelical theology using whatever sources may help in this endeavour.

The attempt to identify poverty must, I believe, be accompanied by a sensitivity to the reality of this phenomenon in the modern world. After all, our concern here is not with abstract theory but with human life and suffering. Therefore reflection should be consciously contextual, it should involve an expanding awareness of the reality of the poverty surrounding us and not allow our theol-

ogy to be formulated in isolation from it. This theologizing should also involve a genuine praxis, that is its reflection should arise from the action of faith so that in it thought and practice are held together. The theology envisaged here can have no credibility if it does not operate in the sphere of the service of the poor. It is in the context of such service that we can best learn the identity of the poor.

1. Who are the Poor?

The poor are spoken of in two major ways in this thesis. First as those deprived of physical necessities and second as those who are socially and politically oppressed.

1.1. The Poor as those Deprived of Physical Necessities

In his Introduction to the second edition of *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutierrez refers to the three meanings of the term poverty in the "Medellin document"1 which provide a clue to the understanding of poverty in liberation theology. They are: poverty as an evil, "something God does not want; spiritual poverty, in the sense of a readiness to do God's will, and solidarity with the poor, along with protest against the conditions under which they suffer" (1988:xxv). These three aspects might be said to embody the basic elements of poverty. It involves deprivation in its various forms, and should therefore never be idealized or condoned for it takes from people that which should be part of their human life. The poor have been described by Jorge Pixley and Clodovis Boff as "those who suffer from basic economic need, those who are deprived of the material goods necessary to live with any dignity" (1989:1). At the same time another dimension shows the poor as a group who in their socio-economic condition are open to God, the "poor in spirit" who are truly "blessed". Then there is the element of oppression which calls for solidarity with those who suffer exploitation and whose poverty is an evil to be combated.

In any consideration of "the poor" it is the concept of physical deprivation which most naturally comes to mind as the first meaning of the term. Whatever else it may mean "poor" initially conveys the idea of lack and want. Because this is lack of life's necessities poverty is an evil which has dehumanizing and painful consequences.

While poverty is a relative term which describes degrees of want, there are those who can be said to be poor in absolute terms. This condition has sometimes been measured by what has been termed the "Poverty Datum Line" or "Minimum Subsistence Level" which describes an income needed to cover the basic essentials of life (Nurnberger 1978:29).

In a volume edited by Samuel and Sugden2 the meaning of poverty as physical deprivation is seen to involve different levels of want. In considering "the sociological questions" connected with poverty, there are three ways in which the poor are perceived. There are those who are below the subsistence level. "In India, 60% of the population are assessed to be below the 'poverty line' defined as the amount of money needed to buy enough food for normal physical life and work" (1983:14). Then there are those who live in relative poverty. This has been defined as: "a level of income sufficiently low to be generally regarded as creating hardship in terms of the community's prevailing living standards" (1983:15). The third perception is of those who are are exploited and oppressed as a class. "The poor are defined by their class position in the organisation of society, over against the rich, the bourgeois, the middle class and the oppressors" (1983:15). As with Gutierrez, there is reference first to physical deprivation, then to social oppression.

Reference has already been made to the concept of "spiritual poverty". This is not included as a major aspect within this thesis for the following reasons. First, I see it occurring in the bible only as a "secondary" emphasis normally related to physical

poverty and seldom, if ever, occurring in isolation from it. Second, this spiritual dimension, though valid, is misused by many evangelicals to obscure the primary meanings of poverty and its relative unimportance as a category for understanding the identity of the poor needs to be noted. Third, within the context of this thesis, my concern is to affirm the concrete meanings of poverty which are reflected in concepts of deprivation and oppression in an effort to counter the common "spiritualizing" which has occurred in evangelical theology. Therefore, although the category of the "poor in spirit" is acknowledged, it does not feature as an essential part of this definition.

It is also important to note that in speaking of "the poor" we are speaking in collective rather than individual terms. Pixley and Boff in their definition of "the poor" make this their starting point in speaking of a "collective phenomenon". They say: "Poverty today is a social, structural, massive problem. The poor make up whole classes, masses and peoples" (1989:1). This is an important emphasis for this thesis because part of its intention is to challenge the individualism which characterizes much of evangelical thinking. Thus, without neglecting the needs of poor individuals, the primary concern here is to view "the poor" collectively as a class and therefore to seek solutions to poverty in social and structural terms rather than in terms of the relief of individuals. This contrasts with the common evangelical tendency to combat poverty only with welfare and relief and to neglect social action which addresses its causes in systems which exploit the poor.

1.2. The Poor as those who are Socially Oppressed

This concept of "the poor" is broader than that of physical deprivation. Seen, in the words of Pixley and Boff, as "the product of a conflictive process", the poor are those classes whose impoverishment has not come about naturally but by "the forces of a system of domination" (1989:3). If poverty is understood within

this social context then it refers to more than physical deprivation and may not even in all cases involve this.

Pixley and Boff have suggested that there are three groups who make up the poor today. They are, first, the *socio-economic* poor. These are the marginalized (those shut out of the economic system, the unemployed or part-employed); and the exploited (the "working poor" unjustly treated by the system). Second, there are the *socio-cultural* poor, groups including blacks, indigenous peoples and women who are oppressed by dominant systems. Third, there are what Pixley and Boff call the "*New Poor*" of industrial societies. These, among others, are the physically and mentally handicapped, the suicidally depressed, and old people dependent on state pensions (1989:8-10). This is, I believe, a helpful formulation which expands the view of "the poor" to include all those who in one form or other are victims of dominant and oppressive social norms and systems. The common factor for the groups in view becomes marginalization and discrimination rather than economic hardship, though invariably this also accompanies the experience of oppression in some way. "The classical image of the poor as a ragged figure begging a crust from door to door is something we have to put behind us, to be replaced by a less romantic and more realistic image of the poor. They are those who are oppressed in all manner of ways, and who seek their liberation" (Pixley and Boff 1989:5).

This view of poverty as oppression is one which I see to be particularly valuable in the development of an evangelical theology of the poor. For one thing, it strongly emphasizes the collective aspect of poverty and therefore calls for a social rather than merely individual assessment of the phenomenon. It also views poverty in a way which includes its fundamental cause, oppression, and therefore is a more complete perspective of this reality. In addition, it is a view which, as we shall see later, is in line with the biblical emphasis that oppression is the major cause of poverty. Therefore, in our definition of the poor, the element of oppression is of great importance. Strictly speaking, the expression "the poor", as it will be used in this thesis, means the

oppressed-poor. Although it will not always be expressed in this form, it is this concept which is intended.

1.3. Definition

This initial discussion has highlighted what I see as the essential elements for a definition which will seek to answer the question; Who are the poor? The following statement draws these elements together and also adds one or two aspects not previously mentioned.

The poor are an oppressed class or classes3 of people who are marginalized and exploited by social systems and whose oppression is expressed in economic and cultural forms. Their condition often involves physical deprivation and sometimes destitution. Within the biblical context they are on occasion spoken of as the "poor in spirit", but this is a secondary category and will not feature prominently in this thesis. While the plight of poor individuals calls for attention and their relief is important, the major challenge of the oppressed-poor is that they compose a class or classes of people whose existence calls for fundamental changes in those social structures which exploit and discriminate against them. In this thesis the concept of "the poor" will be used in two ways. First, they will be seen as a people-group to whom special attention is given, whose condition constitutes an ethical and socio-political challenge. Here the relevant question is: Who are the poor? Second, the concept of "the poor" will also be used as a category of theological understanding. Here the question will be: In what way is our understanding of the gospel affected by the poor?

This definition with its twin emphases of oppression and deprivation will form the basis for the discussion concerning the poor in this thesis. As we proceed in this chapter more insights will be added as we attempt to further identify the poor. This additional material will serve both to justify and to develop the dual foundation laid in this section.

2. The South African Context of Poverty

These words are being written early in 1990 in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, an area which has been characterized by violence in the black townships and rural areas surrounding the city for more than three years. This tragic situation, and the broader country-wide violence, is directly related to poverty. I believe that an analysis of the South African context reveals that the reality of oppression, with its resulting poverty, lies at the heart of this society's problems. In this section poverty in South Africa will be considered with particular reference to this connection to oppression.

South Africa has recently entered a new political phase. Under President F W de Klerk the politics of negotiation has become the watchword of the ruling Nationalist Party, signalling new hope for some. In assessing this situation it must be noted, however, that at this stage negotiation is not a reality but only a proposal. In an Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) pamphlet entitled *Negotiations, Defiance, and the Church* there is a question about the motivation for this emphasis on negotiation. It is pointed out that the Nationalist government is facing the most serious political and economic crisis in its history. Sanctions and the threat of increased economic pressure are having an effect. "But more important still is the threat that in June, 1990, SA's huge loans will not be rolled over or re-scheduled. It has therefore become imperative for the regime to show some evidence that it is moving towards a negotiated settlement" (Koinonia 1989:3). Even more significantly, pressure on the government is mounting from within the country. In the ruling party's response the emphasis on negotiation shows concern to prevent one "group" from dominating another. In the Nationalist Five Year Plan, "group" or "group rights" are mentioned 39 times while "negotiation" occurs 14 times. This, according to the document, is an "attempt to have apartheid without domination" (Koinonia 1989:3-4).

According to the above mentioned ICT publication, the talk of negotiation is misleading if it is based on the false notion that the conflict in South Africa is merely a case of misunderstandings and prejudice whose resolution can come through dialogue and mutual understanding. "This point of view is, to say the least, naive. We are not dealing only with a range of misunderstandings and prejudices; we are dealing with oppression, injustice, lies, power struggles, selfishness and sin" (Koinonia 1989:3).

This assessment is significant because it locates the heart of the country's problem in oppression and injustice. It is a similar perspective which the examination of poverty in this chapter will reflect in attempting to establish that poverty is mainly caused by political and economic oppression.

The basic tool we will use in this section on South Africa is the "Report for the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa" (Wilson and Ramphele).4 In this work the oppressed-poor in South Africa are pictured in the following way:

> Thousands of South African babies are dying of malnutrition and associated diseases; two million children are growing up stunted for lack of sufficient calories in one of the few countries in the world that exports food; tens of thousands of men are spending their entire working years as lonely "labour units" in single-sex hostels whilst their wives and children live generally in great poverty in the overcrowded reserves. This structural violence assaults the majority of people living in South Africa as harshly as any physical confrontation (1989:4).

The first part of this work by Wilson and Ramphele concerns "The many faces of poverty". In it poverty appears as a lack of physical facilities such as earth, fire, and water; as inadequate income for work; as unemployment; as hunger and sickness; as insufficient housing and harmful environment; as disadvantages in literacy and learning; as powerlessness and vulnerability in which children, women, the elderly, and disabled, especially are victims of the system. In a further section oppression ("Apartheid's Assault on the Poor"), and dispossession5 appear as other aspects of South African poverty.

Intrinsic to such poverty is the fact that it involves an attack on human dignity. "In South Africa...harsh disrespect is embedded in the very structure of the society in many different ways, including the migrant labour system and a set of laws that both classifies and discriminates against people according to racist criteria that are unacceptable anywhere in the world" (1989:5).

2.1. The Historic Situation of Oppression

In South Africa the most striking feature of poverty is the degree of inequality that exists. Statistics in 1970 showed that 20 per cent of the population owned 75 per cent of the wealth, compared with 62 per cent in Brazil and 39 per cent in the United States. "South Africa's Gini coefficient (which measures inequality) was the highest of any of the 57 countries in the world for which data was available", that is in 1978 (1989:18). This means that the division between rich and poor is greater in South Africa than in any other country in which similar measurements have been made.

This inequality is also emphasized in a recent edition (June 1990) of Trust Bank's *Econovision* where it is pointed out that "South African income distribution is one of the most unequal in the world....the top 10% of the country's income earners receive as much as half of the country's annual income while 50% of the population receive only 10% of the annual income" (Natal Witness 1990b:8).

Characteristic of South Africa is the degree to which poverty follows racial differences. "Whilst poverty is not confined to any one racial-caste in South Africa it is concentrated mostly amongst blacks, particularly Africans" (1989:19). Its nature is reflected in the words of Mrs Witbooi of Philipstown in the Karoo: "Poverty is not knowing where your next meal is going to come from, and always wondering when the council is going to put your furniture out

and always praying that your husband must not lose his job" (1989:14).

One important point concerning South African poverty is the fact that it seems to be worst "in the rural platteland (that is, on white-owned farms, and the small dorps or villages)" (1989:25). Writing of a rural scene Wilson and Ramphele say:

> One of the clearest images of the nature of poverty in the country is the sight of a group of elderly black women, each carrying home on her head a load of firewood weighing up to 50 kg,6 passing underneath the high-tension cables that carry the electric energy between the towns (and farmsteads) of the Republic. South Africa produces 60 per cent of the electricity in the entire continent yet almost two thirds of the total population (and approximately 80 per cent of all Africans) within the country do not have access to that energy for their household requirements. Even within major cities whole townships are still erected without provision for electricity being made (1989:44).

In their tenth chapter, "The Burden of Poverty", the authors trace the history of poverty and oppression from the arrival of the first white settlers, the Dutch, in 1652. This depicts the oppressive factors of South Africa's history prior to the formalization of the system in apartheid in 1948 when the Nationalists came to power. They list the following elements in this history. First is the fact of conquest involving a long process in which indigenous people were subdued by colonialists. This

> ...may finally be said to have culminated in the notorious Land Act of 1913 whereby the conquerors sought to ensure that the land won by conquest should not be lost through the market in the new industrial society that was emerging. In terms of the Act no African was allowed to purchase land outside the reserves, those "scheduled" and "released " areas which eventually added up to a little less than 14 per cent of the total country. Some 75 years later in 1988, that law remains firmly in place as part of the basic scaffolding of the South African political-economic system (1989:191).

The second factor is that of slavery. In 1658, six years after Van Riebeeck's arrival, the first shipment of slaves for private

ownership arrived at the Cape. "Within sixty years of the establishment of the European colony there were more slaves than free burghers in the western Cape" (1989:191). Following the abolition of slavery in the Cape in 1828 the enactment of a series of pass and vagrancy laws served to control movement within the conquered territories. Wilson and Ramphele speak of these as "the timber" from which the "scaffolding" of the whole migrant labour system was built.

The third aspect, which continues to the present day, is the systematic assault on the industrial labour movement. The fourth strand in history is the separation of people by the colour bar. This created a situation in which different races were treated in different ways. The primary factor, however, affecting poverty in South Africa according to the authors has been the migrant labour system.

> ...there is one feature of South Africa's industrial history that is unique. Nowhere else in the world has an industrial economy employed for so long such a high proportion of oscillating migrants (coming from both inside and outside the country) in its labour force. The consequences of this migrant labour system have been... profound (1989:197).

T.R.H. Davenport also emphasizes the uniqueness of the organized migrant labour of the diamond and above all gold mines as the "characteristic South African mode of employment". Its significance, together with the colour bar, was to act as a device to protect the interests of white South Africans and to determine the inferior position of blacks in society (1987:526-527).

According to Wilson and Ramphele

> The migrant system is not confined to the mines. One of the most notable features of the major urban centres in South Africa during the past twenty five years has been the building of single sex barracks to house up to 12 000 black workers at a time. As recently as June 1985 the government announced plans to build more such compounds, making it plain it has no intention of phasing out the system...It is estimated that over 2 million of the 5 million black workers in the South African economy are

> migrants; the other 3 million live, with their families, in the urban townships or on the white-owned farms of the country. Approximately one quarter of them work in the mines. The vast majority of the migrants - over 1,5 million in mid-1984 - come from reserves within the country, while some 350,000 (17 per cent) come from outside South Africa....
>
> Meanwhile, what of the rural community that has sent most of its able-bodied men away to the cities to work for up to two years at a stretch? As the years have passed, the various sending areas have gradually shifted from producing food within the geographic areas to producing gold and other industrial products elsewhere. As a consequence, local food production has fallen. Seen from the perspective of the economy as a whole, the system makes sense. Men go off to the mines to improve their material position, resources are allocated more efficiently, and output increases. The difficulty comes when one asks what happens to production within the geographic area from which the migrants have come....
>
> One important consequence of a century of industrial revolution in southern Africa, combined with a system of migrant labour,...is that the black rural areas - the reserves and the neighbouring states (particularly Mozambique and Lesotho) - have become less able to generate, from within their boundaries, a means of livelihood for their inhabitants in 1988 than they were when gold was discovered a full century earlier (1989:199,200,201).

2.2. Apartheid's Assault on the Poor

The history of oppression in South Africa may be divided into two main periods, the period preceding 1948 when earlier decisions and policies prepared the way for the second post-1948 period in which oppression came to be formalized in the Nationalist government's policy of apartheid. Though apartheid may legitimately be thought of as a social system which predates its systemization in the advent of the Nationalists to power in 1948 (Prozesky 1990:126), nevertheless it is particularly through the politics of apartheid as systematically implemented since that time that oppression has most overtly been expressed.

In the opening words of their Introduction Wilson and Ramphele say that in South Africa; "Poverty is a profoundly political issue"

(1989:4). They develop this theme in the chapter entitled "Apartheid's Assault on the Poor." In this chapter six major lines of attack are identified.

The first concerns the strategy employed in encouraging the independence of the former High Commission Territories. The previous policy which sought incorporation changed under Verwoerd to support for their independence which, because of their dependence on South Africa, according to the authors carried all sorts of gains for the white Republic (1989:204-207).

Secondly, the prevention of black urbanization, involving the various regulations to control the movement of black people has been a fundamental element in their suffering. The authors trace some of the details of this restrictive legislation and its human impact (1989:207-216).

In the third place the major factor of forced removals is considered. "It has been estimated that in the 23 years from 1960 - 1983 a total of 3,5 million people, almost all of them black, have been subject in terms of government policy, to forced removal from one place to another where they did not choose to go" (1989:216). The authors mention various categories of forced removal and give examples of the suffering caused by this brutal policy.

The fourth factor in the political assault on the poor relates to the Bantu Education policy. The imposition under the Nationalist government of a special system of education for blacks has caused untold suffering.

> As far as wider educational policy is concerned the essence of the case against apartheid's educational programme has been that it is unfair and racist: that it is one of the fundamental reasons why whites are rich and blacks are poor. This is true. The education process in South Africa is such that, in general, whites have had innumerable advantages over blacks in acquiring the skills necessary to fill jobs at the upper end of the economic pyramid (1989:226).

In the fifth place the authors mention the crushing of organizations which aim to give political power to the poor. The potential power of black people in the political economy is vast, this is understood by the ruling party and they have acted ruthlessly to ensure that such power is crushed (1989:226-227).

Sixthly, destabilization of neighbouring states is cited as an example of the way in which the poor have suffered through the political system. The authors speak of the incontrovertible fact that "South Africa's aggressive military presence in Angola and her support, notably through the MNR (Renamo) in the early 1980s, of a policy of destabilization in Mozambique have been major causes of untold misery for people in those countries" (1989:227).

Wilson and Ramphele summarize their argument in the following way:

> The essence of our argument is that the existing distribution of wealth and income has its roots in the way in which the single economy of southern Africa has developed, particularly during the past hundred years of its industrial revolution. This pattern of accumulation and development has been shaped in large measure by the interaction of political and economic forces. In tracing this process of interaction we have found it useful to consider our history in two phases: the period before 1948 and the years of apartheid since then. This division is helpful not least in that it serves to emphasize the important truth that much of the least attractive part of the South African political economy stems directly from its earlier history as part of the British and, before that, Dutch empires. At the same time, as this chapter makes clear, the political policies of the past 40 years have had a devastating impact on most of the poorer sections of the South African population....Indeed it is precisely this dimension of premeditation or deliberate policy in impoverishing people that makes poverty in South Africa different from that in so many other parts of the world. At the same time we recognize that there is much in South African poverty which is similar to that elsewhere (1989:230).

2.3. The Identity of the Poor in South Africa

Our consideration of poverty in South Africa has highlighted its connection to oppression. The materials reflected in Wilson and Ramphele clearly support the contention that this is the primary factor in understanding the situation of the South African poor. Both prior to and following the Nationalist advent to power in 1948 pressures exerted by economic and political structures have been major contributors to the existence of a large class of disadvantaged people in this country. There are, I believe, at least three significant factors which characterize this marginalization of the poor in South Africa.

2.3.1. Racial Discrimination

This is the most obvious aspect of the rich-poor division in this country. We have already noted the degree of inequality which exists and the connection this has to racial differences. According to the 1980 figures reflecting comparative income received by the various racial divisions the minority white group received almost two thirds of the total income.7 These economic inequalities symbolize an overall discrimination against black people and may be seen as just one aspect of the way in which apartheid creates victims in South Africa. While it may be an oversimplification to regard the separation in this country in merely black-white terms, for a class as well as racial distinction divides the privileged from the disadvantaged, nevertheless racial differentiation undoubtedly is a decisive factor, for being black imposes an inferior status on people in a multitude of ways.

Martin Prozesky has enumerated some of these disadvantages imposed by

> the social and political arrangements that have been in force in this country since Union in 1910 going back much further..., in which the position of black people has been legally and practically inferior to that of whites by every significant measure - access to economic power,

> the vote, citizenship, education, health care, life expectancy, work opportunities, income, freedom of movement, prospects of improvement and even places of worship and burial. I do not for a moment deny that some of these measures of imposed inferiority have improved, especially in the past few years. We must acknowledge these. But still the practical realities of black people's lives remain fundamentally inferior, for example, in disparities of education, housing, political and economic power, and civil rights. In this sense apartheid is still very much alive (1990:126).

2.3.2. Economic Exploitation

The work by Wilson and Ramphele depicts a history which, dating from the arrival of the first Dutch settlers in 1652, has in a variety of ways created a system which has enriched white and impoverished black people. This history tells the story of a complex of events through which the economy of the country has been built and the ruling class enriched at the expense of the black population. Policies have been pursued which have seemed to be for the good of the economy as a whole but have had a devastating effect on the poorer sections of the community. The orientation of the system has been against those who are most vulnerable.

In considering movement towards transformation in South Africa, Wilson and Ramphele make a statement concerning the poor which, I believe, encapsulates their essential predicament and its potential solution. Speaking of the "no-win situation" of the poor in which they are adversely affected by both inflationary and anti-inflationary policies they say:

> Precisely because it is the poor who are most vulnerable to the ravages of inflation and of unemployment which can result from trying to curb it, all policies aimed at dealing with the matter need to be examined primarily from the perspective of their impact on the poor, rather than, as is currently the case, from the perspective of big business or central government (1989:253).

These words reflect on a current situation arising from a history weighted against the weakest members of the community where fre-

quently investors' profits have mattered more than the welfare of the poor. The fact that this happens throughout the world does not lessen its impact in this country, nor deny its unique features of premeditation and racist policy. The existence of such economic discrimination calls for a renewal in our society in which more humane policies will be formulated and the situation of the poor will begin to exert an influence on decision making. In the words of Wilson and Ramphele: "In the context of the whole global economy, insistence on the centrality of human beings, particularly those who are most vulnerable, in any process of economic and political change is crucial" (1989:280).

Thus we can identify the oppressed-poor in South Africa as those who have borne the burden of exploitation and whose impoverishment has enriched the affluent community.

2.3.3. Powerlessness

A third factor in the marginalization of the South African poor has been the degree to which the historic process has produced powerlessness among them. This has been expressed in a multitude of ways, many of which are directly related to specific policies. Thus the Bantu Education policy has produced an inferior educational experience which places black people at an immense disadvantage. Economic policies, as we have seen, have produced a level of dependency in which there is a chronic lack of resources in all sectors of the black community. The assault on black labour movements has restricted the power of workers and deliberately sought to create a form of dependency through which the white minority has maintained control. The ruthless crushing of black political organizations through an extensive legal and security network has sought to produce a black population unable to organize for the defense of their interests. These and other factors make the experience of the oppressed-poor in this country one of powerlessness.

It is this element of powerlessness which denies the assumption that welfare, relief, or even development is sufficient in combating the problem of poverty. The basic issue is not provision of resources or even ability to acquire resources, it is self determination, the freedom to choose, being subjects rather than objects of ones own destiny, for the issue of poverty cannot be separated from that of political control and oppression. As poverty is a profoundly political issue, so its alleviation is also a political issue. While political liberation cannot be expected to produce economic independence and magically cure the effects of a history of disadvantage, such empowerment is essential for the commencement of a journey towards some degree of self sufficiency. Wilson and Ramphele have said:

> Power lies at the heart of the problem of poverty in southern Africa. Without it those who are poor remain vulnerable to an ongoing process of impoverishment....A radical shift of the present political power structure away from a racial oligarchy to a genuine democracy is essential as part of the process of transforming the South African political economy (1989:258).

From these considerations we may describe the identity of the oppressed-poor in South Africa as one of powerlessness whose effects cannot be overcome without genuine political liberation and empowerment.

This portrait of the poor in South Africa highlights the fact that the perceptions of poverty prevalent in traditional evangelical thinking are often totally inadequate for coping with the realities of impoverished contexts. Individualistic views which ignore the social causes of the problem and seek solutions in handouts which only further increase dependency need to be countered by more holistic perspectives. Such perspectives, I believe, are allied to the development of a theology of the poor which will empower the evangelical community to shake off those aspects of its theology which imprison it in an individualistic and paternalistic mind set.

3. The Bible and the Poor

In exploring the identity of the poor the witness of scripture is crucial for evangelicals. Because the authority of the bible is such a central element in evangelical theology our arguments concerning the character of the poor cannot have any credibility as evangelical formulations unless they can be shown to be biblical. Therefore we must address the central question; How does the bible speak of the poor? More precisely; What biblical evidence is there to support our identification of the poor as those who are deprived and oppressed and for the place they are consequently given in this thesis?

A first fact which needs to be clearly stated is that the bible has a great deal to say about the poor, to the extent that we may affirm that the nature and situation of the poor is a major theme within it. As we shall see in the subsequent chapter, recent evangelical thinking has been marked by a "discovery" of how important this theme is in the bible. One report tells of how participants in a consultation8 had been "shaken... to see... the amount of space devoted in scripture to the poor and to God's dealings with them and for them" (Samuel, Sugden:1983:45). Referring to the biblical emphasis part of the Draft Report of the Consultation says:

> The poor refers to the manual worker who struggles to survive on a day to day basis, the destitute cowering as a beggar; the one reduced to meekness, the one brought low....those weak and tired from carrying heavy burdens, the leper and very often "the common people"...the majority of references indicated that the poor are the mercilessly oppressed, the powerless, the destitute, the downtrodden...it had been the rich who accommodated to the religious and social demands of the Greek and Roman overlords.
>
> The poor tended to remain faithful to God. Some rich actually became poor because of their faithfulness. So the poor and the faithful became the same. There is no indication that in this use (of "poor in spirit" in Matt. 5:3) economic realities were excluded (1983:2-3).

The intention of this section is to give sufficient exposure to this biblical material to establish that the perception of the poor proposed within this thesis is one which is in harmony with the emphasis of the bible. Its purpose is to provide enough biblical argument without attempting the major task of a technical exegesis of all significant passages. My argument is that within the bible there is a strong and extensive tradition of special concern for the poor which is often ignored and needs to be exposed. The materials which follow attempt to bring this biblical emphasis to light without embarking on a thorough and detailed summary of the topic.9

Within this framework I will attempt to organize my understanding of the biblical witness according to a topical arrangement in which key passages will be quoted with the addition in some cases of brief exegetical comment and theological reflection. Added to this, other materials which I see to be helpful in illuminating the biblical record will be included.

It is my conviction that a radical evangelical theology of the poor formulated in South Africa at this time involves a call to the evangelical community to awaken to this neglected emphasis and in turning to the bible to hear the Word of God concerning the poor. One reason why such awakening is necessary is simply that much of the advance in the discovery of this theme among mainline evangelicals has not filtered through to the conservative sections of the South African constituency, where it has it has been countered by the strong influence of right wing fundamentalism. In addition, as we shall see later, the mainline evangelical community has not taken this biblical witness seriously enough. It is the radical movement representing third world insights which is focussing on this biblical emphasis and seeking to highlight its crucial significance. This section then, will attempt to provide some indication of the importance and nature of the bible's witness concerning the poor and in so doing call evangelicals particularly to awaken to this neglected area of biblical teaching.

3.1. Oppression as an Important Theme in Biblical Terminology

A valuable study in this regard is the one by evangelical biblical scholar Thomas Hanks.10 In this work he investigates the vocabulary for "oppression" that is used in the Old Testament. Summarizing his conclusions he says:

> Oppression is a fundamental structural category of biblical theology, as is evidenced by the large number of Hebrew roots denoting it (10 basic roots; 20 in all); the frequency of their occurrence (555 times); the basic theological character of many texts that speak of it (Gen. 15; Exod. 1-5; Ps. 72, 103, 146; Isa. 8-9, 42, 53, 58, etc.); and the significance of oppression in Israel's great creedal confession (Deut. 26:5-9) (1983:38).

This extensive lexical study by Hanks certainly underlines the importance of this theme in the Old Testament. A similar treatment is the one by Harvey Perkins11 in which he focuses on five Hebrew roots which express poverty and oppression (Perkins 1983:33-45).

The first of these terms is the Hebrew *chaser* which refers to poverty as lack or inadequacy, and therefore need. It speaks intensely of hunger, the lack of bread and water (2 Sam.3:29; Amos 4:6; Prov. 12:9; 13:25) (1983:34).

The second term, *yarash*, refers to poverty as dispossession. This verb leads to three adjectives used to denote poor in the sense of dispossessed. An example is the story in 2 Samuel 12:1-4 in which a rich man with many flocks and herds is visited by a guest and takes the only ewe lamb of his poor neighbour to feed the visitor. The adjective "poor" used three times (verses 1,2, and 4) to describe the man whose lamb was taken is from this Hebrew root. Perkins comments: " An arrogant and ruthless act of dispossession, and a story of a kind we hear so often between land-owner and peasant" (1983:36).

The third Hebrew word, *dal*, expresses poverty as frailty and weakness. This term which appears widely in the Old Testament implies that poverty is an issue related to power. Perkins writes:

> The poor (*dal*) are subject without defence to the exercise of power, as by "a roaring lion or a charging bear" (Prov. 28:15). Indeed the poor are defined by the (sic) frailty and the rich by their power in one sentence (Ruth 3:10; Prov. 10:15). It is the exercise of power for their own ends over the frail who cannot defend themselves that constitutes injustice. "He has crushed and abandoned the frail poor. He has seized a house which he did not build" (Job 20:19) (1983:38-39).

A fourth Hebrew term, *ebyon*, depicts poverty as need and dependence. This is often used together with *dal* (frailty), as for example in the song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:8 where the Lord is said to "raise the poor (*dal*) from the dust and raise the needy (*ebyon*) from the ash heap". Perkins sees a need to combat poverty by both assisting powerless individuals and working to change unjust structures which victimize them. He says that both must be done and quotes Isaiah 58;6-7 in which there is a call to "let the oppressed go free" as well as to "share your bread with the hungry" (1983:41).

The fifth Hebrew term, *ani*, expresses the idea that poverty involves oppression. The root from which the adjective comes carries ideas of bringing low, afflicting, subduing, and exercising force in dominating in for instance sexual violation or economic oppression. This is the most common Old Testament word translated into English as "poor". This word, according to Perkins is complex in its reference, (it can mean humble, materially poor, or troubled), but in its basic thrust it concerns oppression. Reflecting on its use in some Old Testament references to the oppressed-poor, he writes:

> In arrogance the wicked hotly pursue them, sit in ambush in the villages, and stealthily watch for the hapless (Ps. 10:8-9). They trample them underfoot (Is. 26:6) and turn aside justice from them (Amos 2:7). Isaiah denounces the elders and princes because the spoil of the oppressed poor is in their houses (Is. 3:14), those who ruin the oppressed poor with lying words, even when their plea is right (32:7); those who rob them of their right by iniquitous decrees, and writers who keep writing oppression (10:1) (1983:41-42).

In these five terms, plus the statement from Hanks, we have a clear indication that oppression may be regarded as a fundamental category in the way in which the Old Testament speaks of poverty. Taking these terms together we may say that in the Old Testament the poor are the oppressed-poor, their oppression involving weak people being dispossessed by the powerful, those in want being exploited by the rich, those with no resources being crushed by those with abundance, and those who are most vulnerable being afflicted and violated by oppressors referred to as "the wicked" (Psalm 10:2). In Exodus 3:9 (as translated by Hanks) Yahweh tells Moses: "And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them". The Hebrew word *lahats* is translated "oppression" and "oppress", it indicates a pressure which is exerted and causes pain. It is this word that is used in the story of Balaam in Numbers 22:25 when the ass "pushed against the wall and pressed (*lahats*) Balaam's foot against the wall" (Hanks 1983:10). It is important to note that this is an external pressure, a situation brought about in Exodus by the Egyptians who were said to oppress the Israelites and cause them to cry out to Yahweh. The disadvantaged situation in view is not accounted for by moral deficiencies or insufficient development on the part of the Israelites. This is a pressure brought about by human action as in the similar situation pictured in Amos 4:1 where the word *ratsats* meaning "crush, grind pound" is used and the women of Samaria are called "cows of Bashan...who oppress the poor and crush the needy" (Hanks 1983:11).

At the heart of the Old Testament concept of oppression is the record of the Exodus in which Yahweh hears the cry of his people and liberates them from the bondage of Egypt. This is a pivotal point in their history in which Yahweh says to Moses "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians" (Exodus 3:7-8). This epochal event clearly witnesses to

God's identification with the oppressed and his activity on their behalf.

Ronald Sider has referred to the way God has acted on behalf of the poor and oppressed at the "pivotal points of revelation history" (1977:54). He identifies these pivotal points as, the Exodus, the time of Israel's Captivity, and in the Incarnation of Christ (1977:54,55,59). "At the crucial moments when God displayed his mighty acts in history to reveal his nature and will, God *also* intervened to liberate the poor and oppressed" (1977:54).

In a valuable New Testament study12 Wolfgang Stegemann refers to the Greek words for poverty that are used. The most common of these is *ptochos*, which is prefered to *penes* which was the commonest term in ancient Greek literature. He sees the reason for this preference in the real-life situation of the people described by the term. They were "desperately poor, wretched creatures who (were) fighting for their survival" (1984:14). According to Stegemann, in Greek literature there was a distinction between the destitute one who has nothing (*ptochos*), and the one who has little and must live frugally (*penes*). "The latter folk (*penetes*) included small farmers and artisans who depended on their own labor and as a rule had to eke out a living. Their counterparts were the rich (*plousioi*) who lived from their wealth and were able to employ others in support of their own easy life" (1984:14). The destitute (*ptochoi*), were the extreme antithesis of the rich. It seems that their number had increased considerably in the period of the Roman empire (1984:14).

Stegemann refers also to metaphorical uses of the term *ptochos* (Gal. 4:9; 2 Cor 8:9; Matt 5:3), and sees these as dependent on the social reality which they reflect. "In most cases the terms for `poor' in the New Testament are used in their original socioeconomic sense" (1984:15).

The use of this term is also linked by Stegemann to other expressions which refer to the plight of the poor. They are mentioned in

one breath with the sick, maimed, blind and lame (Luke 14:13,21; 4:18-19; 7:22; Matt. 11:5; 25:35), with the naked (Rev.3:17; Matt 25:36), and with the hungry (Luke 3:11; James 2:15-16) (1984:16-18).

The word destitute is the one which most aptly describes the poor of New Testament times. Such people including blind and lame beggars (Mark 10:46-52; Acts 3:1-10), were dependent on alms for the basics of life. Stegemann writes: "Thus the face of poverty as presented in the New Testament is basically this: the poor are destitute, always close to starvation, often identified along with the disabled and the severely ill, poorly clothed, and dependent on the help of strangers" (1984:18). The significant factor in this New Testament description is the special interest shown in this class of people. According to Stegemann

> Our comprehensive information concerning the circumstances of the destitute in antiquity that is communicated by the Synoptic Gospels, and comes through no other documents of this time, has nothing at all to do with the fact that this group of wretched people made up a notable proportion of the society at that time. On the contrary, we seek in vain for an equally apparent special *interest* in the poor in other contemporary texts - outside of Judaism that is. The special significance of the poor for the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ must be understood against the background of the socioeconomic and religious (Jewish) origins of the Christian movement....To state the case somewhat provocatively: the Jesus movement in this particular form - that of a religious movement of the poor - could only have originated within Palestinian Judaism at the beginning of the Common Era (1984:18-19).

I see this statement of Stegemann's as linking the movement among the poor in the time of Jesus to its Old Testament antecedents in which the poor featured prominently. Seen in this way the understanding of poverty in the New Testament cannot be divorced from Old Testament emphases on oppression but must be understood as a development of this perspective. In this regard it is important to note that the pauperization of large segments of the population in Palestine at this time was largely due to social and political factors. The subduing of Judea by Pompey in 63 B.C.E. deprived it of

its coastal cities and the Dekapolis, and resulted in curtailed trade and the dispossession of a great number of farmers. Expropriation of enormous stretches of farmland by Herod the Great and their sale to wealthy landowners "led to huge concentrations of land in the hands of a few" (Stegemann 1984:19). Further, says Stegemann, "The crushing burden of taxes, whether imposed by the Herodian dynasty or by the Romans themselves, is of considerable significance. It was instrumental in causing resistance among the impoverished peasants and tenant farmers against the foreign Roman rule and its domestic collaborators" (1984:19). These New Testament materials provide a picture of destitution as closely tied to unjust and oppressive social structures and suggest that in New Testament, as well as Old Testament terms, the concept of poverty is inextricably tied to that of oppression. This reflects a picture in which poverty cannot be biblically understood as resulting merely from lack of skill, laziness, misfortune, or even the will of God. The poor in the bible are the oppressed-poor. The perspective mentioned earlier connecting deprivation and oppression as twin aspects of poverty is, I believe, supported by what we have seen concerning the terminology used for oppression and poverty in the bible.

3.2. Causes of Poverty

Samuel and Sugden have observed that there is a basic "divide...between those who would say that the principle (sic) thing that shapes poverty is the oppression of those who keep people poor, and those who would deny this" (1983:133). This is a key issue in understanding poverty. While there is undeniable complexity in the causes of poverty, the effort must still be made to understand their deepest nature (Gutierrez 1988:xxv). In analyzing these it becomes apparent that traditional views which locate them in the poor themselves are in sharp contrast to those which see an oppressive environment as primarily responsible.

At this point the biblical emphasis already documented needs to be recalled. Even a superficial perusal of these materials suggests that the bible points to oppression as the primary cause of poverty. This is asserted by Thomas Hanks when he writes: "My study on oppression and poverty has led me to the conclusion that oppression is perceived in the Old Testament as *the basic cause* of poverty" (1983:33). In his study13 he lists other causes of poverty mentioned in the Old Testament, such as idolatry (2 Kings 14:26), famine (Gen. 12:10), and laziness and sloth (Prov. 6:6-11). In all he sees more than twenty causes of poverty mentioned in addition to oppression. None of these however compare with the emphasis given to oppression, and some of them (e.g. wars) are directly related to it (1983:34-35).

Hanks sees two ways in which the emphasis on oppression as a cause of poverty can be twisted. He speaks of "Marxist-oriented readers (who) easily leap to the conclusion that according to the Bible oppression is the *only* cause of poverty..." On the other hand conservative readers see oppression as just one in a long list of causes (1983:33-34). This tendency to underestimate the role of oppression is related, according to Hanks, to ideological influences which affect the way scripture is read.

> Conservative evangelicals and conservative Roman Catholics have concentrated too exclusively on the ethical perspectives in the wisdom literature, especially Proverbs, to the neglect of the law and the prophets. Billy Graham and Bill Gothard put great emphasis on the teaching of Proverbs and recommend it for daily reading. This canonical preference reflects and confirms their ideological perception on poverty (1983:35).

By contrast, in assessing the causes of poverty our analysis must, if it is to be informed by biblical Christian norms, take very seriously the prophetic tradition of scripture. This "voice" needs to be heard more clearly, particularly among conservative evangelicals. The words of Isaiah epitomize this emphasis:

> The LORD enters into judgement
> against the elders and leaders of his people:
> "It is you who have ruined my vineyard;

> the plunder from the poor is in your houses.
> What do you mean by crushing my people
> and grinding the faces of the poor?"
> declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty (Is.3:14-15).

3.3. Old Testament Law calls for Justice for the Poor

The law of Israel recorded in the Old Testament contains a clear call for just and equitable treatment of the poor. These calls are sometimes in contexts where they occur alongside harsher elements of the law (for instance the execution of worshipers of "other gods" Exodus 22:20). These other aspects of Israel's law, while needing to be acknowledged, do not alter the fact that there is within the law a strong tradition revealing Yahweh's concern for the poor. One example is the way in which widows, orphans and aliens are identified for special consideration and protection in the following passages:

> Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt.
> Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry (Exodus 22:21-23).

> For the Lord your God is a God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt (Deuteronomy 10:17-19).

> Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.
> When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands" (Deuteronomy 24:17-19).

These are interesting examples of the way in which the poor were identified with three particularly vulnerable classes of people, widows, orphans and aliens, and of the concern to protect them from

exploitation and oppression. This protection of the poor relates to the biblical call for justice. This connection will be considered in a later chapter in which we will see the way in which biblical justice is spoken of as activity on behalf of the disadvantaged.

Another example of concern for the poor in Israel's law was the provision of the Year of Jubilee in Leviticus chapter 25. It stipulated, among other things, that after every fifty years all land was to be returned to its original owners to become part once more of the family heritage from which it originated (Leviticus 25:25-28). This was a measure intended to ensure that rampant inequality should not multiply and that the poor should not in the long term lose their heritage. Whether or not it was ever implemented, it indicates an ideal in which the poor receive special consideration in an attempt to protect them from the rich (Mott 1982:67-68).

An example of this biblical regard for the family inheritance is given in the story of Naboth's vineyard found in 1 Kings 21. Naboth the Jezreelite owned a vineyard near the palace of Ahab the king of Samaria. When Ahab requested this vineyard in exchange for another Naboth refused saying; "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers" (1 Kings 21:3). The outcome was the murder of Naboth at the instigation of Ahab's wife Jezebel, who was a princess of Sidon (1 Kings 16:31) and patroness of the temple of Baal in Samaria. At issue was the clash of two systems. In the Egyptian and Canaanite system the king had supreme rights which virtually allowed his wish to be law. In the Israelite system totalitarian demands were countered by the built in system of family inheritance which gave protection to the peasant population (Pixley, Boff 1989:77-78). Elijah the prophet functions as the champion of the faith of Israel in this story as he confronts Ahab and accuses him of murder and the expropriation of a property to which he had no right (1 Kings 21:19). At the heart of this defence of Israel's tradition and faith lay a defence of the ordinary citizen against the whim of an all powerful ruler, for the God of Israel was seen as the one who was the champion of the

powerless who protected them against oppression. Seen in the light of this significant Old Testament incident Yahweh appears as the God of the oppressed who through his prophet takes up the cause of Naboth and pronounces judgment on his murderers (1 Kings 21:19-24).

3.4. In the Psalms the Poor turn to Yahweh as their Defender

The Psalms were instruments of worship through which the praises of Yahweh were sung. They comprise not only these songs of praise however, but also a whole a range of petition including the cry of the oppressed for vindication, protection and justice. According to Pixley and Boff, in such Psalms God appears not as father but as judge (see Psalm 72:1-4,12-14). Supplicants appear as just persons fallen into misfortune inviting the judge to right the wrongs perpetrated by their enemies. "Logically, those who turn to a judge to right their wrongs will be the weak and the poor, those who lack their own resources to remedy the evils they suffer. It is not surprising, then, that the supplicants in the Psalms often describe themselves as poor and their enemies as insolent rich people" (Pixley, Boff 1989:46-47).

> How long will the wicked, O LORD,
> how long will the wicked be jubilant?...
> They crush your people O LORD;
> they oppress your inheritance.
> They slay the widow and the alien;
> they murder the fatherless (Psalm 94:3-6).

In such petitions the poor look to Yahweh as their refuge and hope for his deliverance from their enemies.

> Arise LORD! Lift up your hand O God.
> Do not forget the helpless
> Why does the wicked man revile God?
> Why does he say to himself,
> "He won't call me to account"?
> But you, O God, do see trouble and grief;
> you consider it to take it in hand.
> The victim commits himself to you;
> you are the helper of the fatherless....
> You hear, O LORD, the desire of the afflicted;
> you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,

defending the fatherless and the oppressed (Psalm 10:12-18).

Through such expressions a view of God as the defender of the weak emerges. The supplicant poor come to see themselves as objects of his special attention and confidently expect him to uphold their cause (Pixley, Boff 1989:48).

> Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
> whose hope is in the LORD his God,
> the Maker of heaven and earth,
> the sea and everything in them -
> the LORD, who remains faithful forever.
> He upholds the cause of the oppressed
> and gives food to the hungry.
> The LORD sets prisoners free,
> the LORD gives sight to the blind,
> the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down,
> the LORD loves the righteous.
> The LORD watches over the alien
> and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
> but he frustrates the ways of the wicked (Psalm 146:5-9).

3.5. The Prophets Challenge the Exploitation of the Poor by the Rich

It was the prophets particularly who kept alive the tradition in Israel that Yahweh takes the part of the poor in a society where the rulers often oppressed and exploited them. (Pixley,Boff 1989:41). This prophetic tradition with its denunciation of powerful and affluent oppressors, its stinging pronouncements of God's judgment on those who "trample" on the poor, its passionate advocacy of justice for the weak, is one of the classic models from any context of a faith which impels the defense of the oppressed-poor. It is a tradition, which I believe, is of particular relevance for evangelicals whose social conservatism has often led to an uncritical endorsement of oppressive systems of authority, and whose biblical understanding has been rendered innocuous by a vague spiritualizing which has silenced its prophetic voice. In situations such as politically oppressive South Africa, where their protestations of adherence to biblical authority carry little

credibility in the suffering black community, conservative evangelicals need to awaken to this prophetic challenge and feel the impact of the cry for social justice,

> Shout it aloud, do not hold back.
> Raise your voice like a trumpet.
> Declare to my people their rebellion
> and to the house of Jacob their sins (Isaiah 58:1).

It was particularly the eighth century prophets such as Amos, Micah, and Isaiah who, living in a time of prosperity which lasted until the start of the Syrian invasions, called for justice for the poor (Pixley, Boff 1989:42). A century later something of this same emphasis appeared in Jeremiah.

There are certain themes which appear in the prophets' message concerning the poor. These may be formulated in the following ways:

3.5.1. Religious Observance Divorced from Justice to the Poor Offensive to God

This is a theme in which there is a strong prophetic outcry against those who meticulously perform all the required sacrifices of the law and neglect their moral obligation to seek justice.

> "The multitude of your sacrifices -
> what are they to me?" says the LORD.
> I have more than enough of burnt offerings,...
> I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats....
> Stop bringing meaningless offerings!
> Your incense is detestable to me....
> Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feast
> my soul hates.
> They have become a burden to me;
> I am weary of bearing them.
> When you spread out your hands in prayer,
> I will hide my eyes from you;
> even if you offer many prayers
> I will not listen.
> Your hands are full of blood;
> wash and make yourselves clean.
> Take your evil deeds
> out of my sight!

> Stop doing wrong,
> learn to do right!
> Seek justice,
> encourage the oppressed.
> Defend the cause of the fatherless,
> plead the case of the widow (Isaiah 1:11-17).

The application of this prophetic perspective in a modern day South African conservative religious setting holds intriguing possibilities. It might say for instance that adherence to many of the highly prized virtues of the evangelical sub-culture such as holding to and defending clearly defined doctrinal standards, regular support of church activities, involvement in evangelistic outreach, systematic bible study and prayer are totally meaningless and rejected by God if the plight of the poor is neglected, if the cause of the oppressor is supported, and if unjust systems of government are given legitimation by a form of religion which is not prepared to stand up and be counted in the struggle against oppression. The expression of such sentiments is often seen to be extremely offensive by conservatives, but they merely represent the sort of thing said by Isaiah in his context. The relevance of such emphases to modern contexts needs to be acknowledged by evangelicals whose adherence to biblical authority is too easily a comfortable theoretical exercise which avoids the obligation to seek to carry out such prophetic biblical directives in concrete modern situations.

The words of Isaiah are paralleled by those of Amos through whom Yahweh declares:

> I hate, I despise your religious feasts;
> I cannot stand your assemblies....
> Away with the noise of your songs!
> I will not listen to the music of your harps.
> But let justice roll on like a river,
> righteousness like a never failing stream (Amos 5:21-24).

In a peace march in Imbali, Pietermaritzburg, on April 8 1990, after more than a week of the worst violence in the history of the troubled area, at a site where a cross was planted in commemoration of the scores of people killed in the conflict, a banner was held

which said "Let justice roll down like water". It is this prophetic demand for justice in specific contexts which lies at the heart of true peace-making and challenges all religious observance to an accompanying faith-inspired action on behalf of the poor.14

3.5.2. God Judges those who Exploit the Poor

Ronald Sider referred to the time of the Captivity as a time in which the prophetic message declared that God destroyed Israel because of mistreatment of the poor (1977:55). The prophecy of Amos to the northern kingdom is of special significance.

> Penetrating beneath the facade of current prosperity and fantastic economic growth, Amos saw terrible oppression of the poor. He saw the rich "trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth" (2:7). He saw the affluent lifestyle of the rich was built on oppression of the poor (6:1-7). He denounced the rich women ("cows" was Amos's word!) "who oppress the poor, who crush the needy" (4:1)....
>
> God's Word through Amos was that the northern kingdom would be destroyed and the people taken into exile (7:11,17).
>
> Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory,
> and stretch themselves upon their couches,
> and eat lambs from the flock,
> and calves from the midst of the stall...
> Therefore they shall be the first of those
> to go into exile
> and the revelry of those who stretch themselves
> shall pass away (Amos 6:4,7) (1977:56).

The same fate was announced for the southern kingdom of Judah by Isaiah. He warned of coming destruction because of the mistreatment of the poor.

> Woe to those who decree iniquitous decrees...
> to turn aside the needy from justice
> and to rob the poor of my people of their right...
> What will you do on the day of punishment,
> in the storm which will come from afar (Is. 10:1-4)?

The same message is echoed by Jeremiah who in his lifetime experienced Judah's Babylonian captivity.

> Wicked men are found among my people;
> they lurk like fowlers lying in wait.
> They set a trap;
> they catch men.
> Like a basket full of birds,
> their houses are full of treachery;
> therefore they have become great and rich,
> they have grown fat and sleek.
> They know no bounds in deeds of wickedness;
> they judge not with justice
> the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper,
> and they do not defend the rights of the needy.
> Shall I not punish them for these things
> says the Lord,
> and shall I not avenge myself
> on a nation such as this (Jer. 5:26-29) (1977:57)?

Evangelical teaching on judgement tends to focus mainly on its future aspect related to individual unbelievers. Irrespective of either the validity or interpretation of this view, there is a neglected aspect of judgement found here in the prophets which needs to be acknowledged. It is the vision of a God whose judgement is expressed in present day history, whose instruments are often totally unaware of this dimension to their actions, and whose motivation is the defence of the poor. These conclusions arise naturally from the prophetic materials cited. In the midst of brutal violence and ruthless oppression, as is the situation in the Pietermaritzburg area at the time of writing, it is virtually impossible to see any sign of such redemptive judgment in the midst of human suffering. Nevertheless, the prophetic emphasis points to the way in which God acts in history and provides a basis of hope for the future. It is this element of hope beyond judgment which needs to be emphasized, for in the Old Testament the prophets announcement of judgment is often followed by the message of hope. This is epitomized in the Exile (judgment) which is followed by the return from captivity (hope). An example is seen in chapters 6 and 7 of Micah where the paragraph headings inserted in the New International Version (NIV) read succesively; "The LORD's Case Against Israel", "Israel's Guilt and Punishment", "Israel's Misery", "Israel Will Rise", and "Prayer and Praise." Within the context of the suffering produced through oppression such judgment can be seen

as the hope of the poor provided it is not divorced from present history or from human action in that history.

3.5.3. A True Knowledge of God Connected to Just Actions on behalf of the Poor

This is a view which is reflected particularly in Isaiah 58 which speaks about a "fasting" which is displeasing to Yahweh. Those whose religious devotion is thus expressed cannot expect God to hear their prayers for

> You cannot fast as you do today
> and expect your voice to be heard on high (verse 4).

Basic to the problem of such fasting is the fact that

> ...on the day of your fasting you do as you please
> and exploit all your workers (verse 3).

In contrast the prophet provides a picture of "true" fasting, what we, in our terms, might describe as authentic spirituality or knowledge of God.

> Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
> to loose the chains of injustice
> and untie the cords of the yoke,
> to set the oppressed free
> and break every yoke?
> Is it not to share your food with the hungry
> and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter-
> when you see the naked to clothe him,
> and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood
> (verses 6-7)?

This in turn will bring God's blessing on those who act in this way and their prayers will be answered (verses 8-9). The nature of those who who enjoy such divine favour is again repeated:

> If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
> with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
> and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
> and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
> then your light will rise in the darkness,

> and your night will become like the noonday (verses 9-10).

Basic to this passage is its view that a "true fasting" cannot exist in isolation from just action on behalf of the poor. Yahweh is not prepared to separate the two elements of spirituality and social action, they belong together and should not be separated. Those who practice a dualism which seeks to keep them apart are those who say;

> "Why have we fasted,...
> and you have not seen it?
> Why have we humbled ourselves,
> and you have not noticed" (verse 3)?

This chapter reflects a perspective on social justice which both identifies it with service for the oppressed and regards it as an essential component of a true knowledge of God.

A similar emphasis on spirituality integrated with justice is expressed by Jeremiah:

> "Did not your father have food and drink?
> He did what was right and just,
> so all went well with him.
> He defended the cause of the poor and needy,
> and so all went well.
> Is that not what it means to know me?"
> declares the LORD (Jeremiah 22:15-16).

Here we have a clear identification of service of the poor with knowing God. Knowing God in this Old Testament sense indicated far more than casual acquaintance, it reflected a covenant relationship of love and trust (Hosea 2:16-23). In such a relationship the commitment to the poor expressed by Jeremiah is inextricably tied to "what it means to know me", to separate these elements is to deny the prophetic perspective in which "knowing the Lord" is inconceivable apart from the practice of social justice.

3.5.4. The Call to Justice a Call to Support the Cause of the Poor

A major expression of the prophetic call to justice says:

> He has showed you, O man, what is good.
> And what does the LORD require of you?
> To act justly and to love mercy
> and to walk humbly with your God (Micah 6:8).

It is important to note that this call to justice comes against the background of the exploitation of the poor. Having expressed Yahweh's requirement Micah sets it in its context.

> Am I still to forget, O wicked house,
> your ill-gotten treasures
> and the short ephah, which is accursed?
> Shall I acquit a man with dishonest scales,
> with a bag of false weights?
> Her rich men are violent;
> her people are liars
> and their tongues speak deceitfully (Micah 6:10-12).

It seems that the reference to the violence of the rich is a metaphorical expression similar to what we in our day might term "structural violence". Thus "acting justly" means that the rich must refrain from economic practices which would do violence to the poor. This perspective is expanded as Micah reflects on the results of such violence to the poor.

> The godly have been swept away from the land;
> not one upright man remains.
> All men lie in wait to shed blood;
> each hunts his brother with a net.
> Both hands are skilled in doing evil;
> the ruler demands gifts,
> the judge accepts bribes,
> the powerful dictate what they desire,
> they all conspire together (Micah 7:2-3).

Here the ruler, judge, the powerful, conspire in an economic assault on the poor which leads to their destruction. It is important to note that it is in this setting of exploitation that one of the clearest calls to social justice in the bible emerges.

Another clear call to justice for the poor is found in Amos chapter 5. Here the prophet addresses those who "turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground" (verse 7). The accusation proceeds:

> You trample on the poor
> and force him to give you grain.
> Therefore though you have built stone mansions,
> you will not live in them....
> You oppress the righteous and take bribes
> and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts (verses 11-12).

In this situation there is a call to "seek the LORD and live" (verses 6 and 4). This call and the repentance it involves is spelt out more plainly in the words:

> Seek good, not evil,
> that you may live.
> Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you,
> just as you say he is.
> Hate evil, love good;
> maintain justice in the courts.
> Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy
> on the remnant of Joseph (verses 14-15).

Here seeking God and seeking good are expressed in seeking "justice in the courts" (verse 15). To seek God and good are spoken of as leading to life ("and you shall live"), suggesting that true repentance, in which individuals turn towards God and away from evil (verse 15), unavoidably involves a turning towards justice, which itself implies a turning towards those who have been deprived of justice, that is the poor. The call to repentance thus involves a call to serve the poor and pursue justice on their behalf.

These prophetic themes constitute an on-going challenge to all oppressive systems which crush the poor. They highlight the predicament of the poor and call for justice on their behalf, a holistic faith which will include commitment to their cause, and a knowledge of God in which the service of the poor will be an integral part.

3.6. Focus on the Poor in the Synoptic Gospels

In turning to the New Testament our attention will focus firstly on the Synoptics and particularly Luke's gospel in which the poor are specially emphasized. Orlando Costas has written that in the early Christian formulation of the incarnation it is "the poor and oppressed preacher who died on Calvary" who is seen as "none other than the Son of God" (1982:8). In Luke's gospel, according to Costas, it is the poor particularly who are in view. He writes:

> writers like Luke saw Jesus' entire life, from his annunciation to his death, from the perspective of the poor. The announcement of his birth is linked with the hope of the poor and disenfranchised (Lk.1:51ff.). He is born in a stable (Lk.2:8) and his parents can only afford to fulfill the requirement of the law with the offering assigned to the poor (Lk.2:24; Lev.12:8). He locates his own mission among the poor, the captives, the sick, and the oppressed (Lk.4:18). He calls the poor the heirs of the kingdom (Lk.6:20). He seems to insinuate an identification with both the wounded man in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk.10:30ff.; c.f.21-28, 38-41) and poor Lazarus in the story of the rich man who went to hell (Lk.16:19ff). He praises Zacchaeus for returning fourfold what he had stolen from the poor (Lk.19:1-10), and points to his healing and heralding ministry as signs of the messianic age (Lk.7:22-23) (1982:8).

The situation of the poor is particularly in view in Mary's song (the Magnificat).

> My soul praises the Lord
> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
> for he has been mindful
> of the humble state of his servant....
> He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
> he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
> He has brought down rulers from their thrones
> but has lifted up the humble.
> He has filled the hungry with good things
> but has sent the rich away empty (Luke 1:46-53).

A radical reversal in fortunes is in view here, rulers and the humble, the rich and the hungry change places. The recording of this song at the outset of the gospel creates an expectation that the coming of the Messiah will have radical social repercussions which

will benefit the poor. C. Hugo Zorrilla has written concerning this song:

> This war of God against the mighty (*dunastas*) is on behalf of those who fear him. Mary identifies with them. Her humility (*tapeinosis*) places her among the poor of the earth who hope for the mercy of God as the power (*kratos*) that will protect them from the ravages of the mighty of this world....
>
> The fearful, humble Mary perceives the power of God as a great expression of concern for those who suffer hunger and are poor....
>
> The figurative language in these central verses (52 and 53) speaks of God as the Almighty who does not compromise with the oppressor. He is portrayed with an anthropomorphic figure (with his arm), with a political figure (puts down the mighty), and with a social figure (the rich he sends away empty) (1986:232).

In Luke a passage of central importance is the announcement by Jesus of the nature of his mission given in the synagogue at Nazareth. Following the account of his baptism and the recording of his genealogy (chapter 3) and the record of his temptation (4:1-13), this passage (Luke 4:14-30) is placed by Luke near the commencement of Jesus' ministry and underlines the nature of his messianic calling. Its setting in the structure of Luke's gospel serves to highlight it crucial importance for understanding the mission of Jesus. In this passage Jesus applies the prophecy from Isaiah 61 to himself:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
> and recovering of sight to the blind,
> to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18-19).

Sider refers to the way some avoid the clear meaning of Jesus by spiritualizing these words. "The words about releasing captives and liberating the oppressed are from Isaiah. In their original Old Testament setting, they unquestionably referred to physical oppression and captivity" (1977:59). Some have argued for a

spiritualizing of the terms of this mission by saying that Jesus did not go around Palestine literally opening prisons and setting captives free. To argue in this way however, is to miss the real point at issue. The question is not the degree of literalness in view here, it is whether the terms of the mission are to be read in their natural concrete historical sense or whether they should be spiritualized. The only way this question can be answered is to look at the gospel records and ask; Are the objects of this mission, the poor, the captives, the blind, the oppressed, depicted as such in normal physical terms in the records, or are they seen in spiritual terms? I believe a reading of the gospels leaves little doubt about the physical and holistic nature of the earthly mission of Jesus of Nazareth which, as we will see shortly, denies the attempt to spiritualize this passage.

In similar very concrete terms we read Luke's version of the so-called "Sermon on the Plain":

> Blessed are you who are poor,
> for yours is the kingdom of God.
> Blessed are you who hunger now,
> for you will be satisfied.
> Blessed are you who weep now,
> for you will laugh.
> Blessed are you when men hate you,
> when they exclude you and insult you
> and reject your name as evil,
> because of the Son of Man....
> But woe to you who are rich,
> for you have already received your comfort.
> Woe to you who are well fed now,
> for you will go hungry.
> Woe to you who laugh now,
> for you will mourn and weep
> Woe to you when all men speak well of you,
> for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets
> (Luke 6:20-26).

In the contrast between the poor and the rich we see a similarity to the emphasis of the Magnificat. It is the poor, hungry and sorrowful who are blessed; whereas the rich, well fed, and happy are cursed. Here the earlier reversal of roles is again suggested in similar radical terms.

There is also a similarity to the Luke 4 passage in the simple direct concreteness of the terminology. Here there is no reference to a spiritual dimension as in Matthew 5:3 ("Blessed are the poor in spirit"), rather the direct contrast between poor and rich excludes any possibility of spiritualizing. Here unquestionably, we have an immensely strong emphasis on the special place occupied by the poor in the thought and emphasis of Jesus.

There is one non-Lukan passage to which reference needs to be made. It is the account of Matthew 25 referring to the coming of the Son of Man in the parable of the sheep and goats. Here again I believe we can argue that the poor are in view because the determination of acceptance by God is based on action towards a certain group of people who in this passage are designated as: the hungry, the thirsty, the strangers, those in need of clothing, the sick, and the captive. Within the context of the time all these naturally suggest that group whom we designate as poor. Earlier comments on the nature of destitution, particularly those of Stegemann support this suggestion.

What is of particular significance in this passage is the way in which Jesus identifies with this group. He calls them his brothers and says that whatever is done for them is also done for him.

> Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick and in prison and go to visit you?"
>
> The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:37-40).

Here we see a solidarity of Jesus with suffering humanity emphasized by his reference to "the least of these". This suggests that Christ appears often in an unknown form in this world, he is received and served in a way which does not always involve a consciousness of his identity, for the question was asked "when did we

see you hungry, or thirsty, unclothed, sick or in prison"? This solidarity is also something required of those who follow Jesus and part of the essence of that following, for acceptance or rejection by God in this story turns on the way in which these oppressed-poor have been treated (verses 34-36 and 41-43).

3.7.Spiritualizing Poverty

We have already noted that on some occasions the bible speaks of a spiritual dimension to poverty. An important question is, how is this perceived? In a conservative tradition the spiritual element is seen to exist in isolation from socio-economic realities. Thus "the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3) are those who are humble in attitude, irrespective of their economic or social position. This interpretation often becomes a lens through which other allusions to poverty are read. The spiritual element tends to dominate the horizon of the interpreter so that poverty is seen as basically a spiritual condition. In a more progressive or radical perspective, however, "spiritual poverty" is not divorced from its historical and physical contexts. It is seen against the background of the Old Testament in which the poor were sometimes seen as those who remained faithful to God.

Stegemann's reference to a metaphorical use of the term "poor" has already been noted. He writes concerning Matthew 5:3:

> Obviously it does not refer to material poverty. Yet it would be a mistake to use this particular passage as the basis of a "spiritualized" interpretation of the other passages on poverty in the Gospels. Furthermore, it should be noted that just this metaphorical use of poverty terminology in the New Testament reveals links between the ancient reader and the actual situation of the poor (1984:15).

Stegemann's statement excluding reference to material poverty in the text is, in my view, open to some question. The metaphorical nature of the reference need not exclude the fact that the

materially poor, who are faithful to God, are in view here. Samuel and Sugden in their "Workshop Report" say:

> The "poor in spirit" are poor in spirit because they are poor in material goods. "Poor in spirit" is not a negative term meaning "spiritually bankrupt". It is a positive term referring to a right spiritual attitude to God, an openness to God. Material poverty leads to spiritual humility which is the right basis for our relationship to God. There was a consensus of opinion that to understand spiritual poverty one needs to experience material poverty (1983:133).

Material poverty, of course, does not always lead to spiritual humility, sometimes it produces bitterness, anger, or dejection, but more precisely it may be seen as a context more likely to produce a sense of the need of God than that of affluence which can have the opposite effect. The important point here, however, is to avoid the common inclination to make "spirtual poverty" the basis for interpreting other New Testament references to poverty. To do this is to spiritualize what is fundamentally a physical reality. An example of this is the well known evangelical exposition of the Sermon on the Mount by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. His interpretation of our text not only makes it an exclusively spiritual reference, but also uses it to govern the words of Luke 6:20; "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God". He says that he thinks "our Lord was even there speaking of `poor' as meaning `not possessed by the worldly spirit', poor in the sense...that you do not rely on riches". This principle, he says, applies to rich and poor alike (1959:44). This is a clear instance of what happens when the historic context of a term is ignored. The secondary meaning becomes primary, the physical reality is spiritualized.

An interesting comment in this debate is that of W.R. Domeris who in referring to the Luke 6 passage says:

> Luke's series of blessings and woes in Luke 6:20-26 indicates by his juxtaposition of the rich and the poor an intended connection between the two. We may no more consider the poor as spiritually poor than we may assume the rich to be spiritually wealthy. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt that the category of the poor as revealed in the Gospel of Luke are the materially poor (1986:60).

In referring to Matthew's term "poor in spirit" Domeris reads this to mean the emotional loss of self-worth which often accompanies material poverty. His argument is based mainly on the use of *en pneumati* or simply *pneumati* (rendered in English as "in spirit"), which he says more normally refers simply to a person's emotional state in distinction to the expression "in the spirit" which as in Matthew 22:43 refers to the Holy Spirit. He acknowledges that there are a few occasions when the expression may have a non-material in opposition to a material reference, but sees these as minimal and suggests that Matthew 5:3 is not one of them. Although I find this an intriguing suggestion and fully subscribe to his main argument concerning the primacy of literal poverty as a biblical category, I question whether his argument on Matthew 5:3 can be sustained. The problem lies in the context in which it is set, which includes elements such as being "meek" (verse 5), hungering and thirsting for righteousness (verse 6), and being "pure in heart" (verse 8). These point to a spiritual dimension and the immediate context here is vastly different from that of Luke 6.

A similar tendency to that of Martyn Lloyd-Jones mentioned above, is seen in the interpretation of Luke 4:16-21. In this passage Jesus declares that the purpose of his mission is to "preach good news to the poor". As we have already briefly noted, this passage is often spiritualized. It is taken to say that Jesus came to bring spiritual liberation, spiritual healing, and that this is good news for the spiritually poor. Where the physical aspects are acknowledged these are made subservient to a primary spiritual objective. An example of this kind of exegesis is seen in Klaus Bockmuehl who writes: "this word of Jesus is probably to be understood primarily spiritually, or as a reference to the certainly numerous but nevertheless individual liberations of such people as were bound by sickness and demons" (1979:21). The use of "primarily spiritually" here points to a common evangelical tendency to allow "spiritual interpretation" to govern the reading of the text.

Referring to this same portion Stephen Mott makes the point that the literal fulfillment of parts of the Isaiah 61 prophecy here (e.g. healing the blind), is a warning against spiritualizing other parts of it. These aspects together, represent the mission of the Messiah in terms of the Old Testament message of justice. Mott also refers to a subsequent passage in Luke 7 where John the Baptist inquires about Jesus as "the one who was to come". At that time Jesus was healing and casting out evil spirits and sent the following answer to John: "report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor" (Luke 7:22). Mott comments: "This passage can hardly be spiritualized. Jesus performed the miracles at the time he spoke the words. His actual deeds of compassion for physical suffering are the evidence that he is the agent of God's Reign" (1982:92). It is interesting to note how Jesus' preaching to the poor is combined with his serving the blind, the lame, and the deaf. We have already noted how these, together with the poor, formed one class. Such instances of Jesus' identification with those who suffer refute a predominantly spiritual interpretation of "the poor".

Gutierrez maintains that "spiritualizing" involves the danger of infidelity to the gospel because it distorts the revelation of God in The Beatitudes.

> If we "spiritualize" this gospel message about the poor...and maintain that the "poor" in the gospel are *first and primarily* the "spiritually" poor rather than plainly and simply the materially poor...then we have an easy time with God. We "humanize" God. We make him more accessible to human understanding....
>
> But if, instead, we take the gospel statements at their face value, unflinchingly and courageously, then what we have is God's love for the poor first and foremost simply because they are poor, simply because they are literally and materially poor. Now we have no easy God at all. Now we are faced with the mystery of God's revelation, and the gift of his kingdom of love and justice (1983:95).

3.8. Good News for the Poor

We have noted that the mission of Jesus was "to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18). Stegemann has linked this mission with what he calls "The Messianic Movement of the Poor" (1981:23).

> The movement within Judaism in Palestine associated with the name of Jesus was a movement *of the poor for the poor*. Apart from the son of a certain carpenter from Nazareth (Mark 6:3), its figureheads are some fishermen from Galilee (Mark 1:16-20), a minor customs employee (Mark 2:13-14), and a zealot (Mark 3:18). Women, too, belonged from the very beginning (Mark 15:40-41) (1984:23).

According to Stegemann Jesus and his disciples shared the desperately poor situation of the country folk, particularly in Galilee. They barely avoided utter poverty. He quotes John Chrysostom who spoke of Jesus and his disciples as "unknown people from poor families" (1981:24-25). The perspective of the poor is reflected in Jesus' disputes with the Pharisees about the Law and the Sabbath, (for example Mark 2:23-28), in which his concern was for "the plight of the poor... (as) the principle of interpretation of the Law..."(1984:25).

Stegemann goes on to speak of "The Hope of the Poor" as the expectation of a radical social transformation within Israel which would free "the little people".

> He has put down the mighty from their thrones,
> and exalted those of low degree;
> he has filled the hungry with good things,
> and the rich he has sent empty away (Luke 1:52-53) (1984:26).

John the Baptist and Jesus, both of whom clashed with the political establishment, were popular with the masses. This popularity is linked by Stegemann to the hope of the poor (1984:26). In speaking of this hope which the healing activity of Jesus stirred he says: "For them he was the prophetic Messiah; in him the hopes of the poor were soon to become reality; in his person the claim to God's

kingdom which they awaited was a living reality - the messianic kingdom of the poor" (1984:30). It is against this historical background that the statement concerning "good news to the poor" needs to be read. For them it was good news for it stirred expectations of liberation. The fact that liberation has a broader reference in scripture and is not confined to these physical dimensions does not diminish this initial emphasis of the gospel as being "good news to the poor." It is this element of giving hope to the poor which distinguishes it as the good news of the kingdom brought by Jesus of Nazareth. In speaking of the gospel communicated to the poor Samuel and Sugden have said:

> We suggest that among the criteria for assessing whether a strategy really evangelises the poor is whether the strategy enables them to experience Jesus as Liberator from all their oppressions, or only as one who comforts them in their distress, pacifies them with spiritual peace, and prepares a home for them beyond the sufferings of this world. Unless they experience Jesus as Liberator have they really heard the good news of the gospel of Jesus? (1983:25)

Continuing from his exposition of "the Movement of the Poor" Stegemann makes a distinction between the early followers of Jesus in Palestine, and the Christian communities which developed beyond it in the Roman Empire. The original followers were mainly the destitute (*ptochoi*), whereas the Christian communities consisted mainly of poorer people (*penetes*), who while identifying with them were not themselves destitute. In some instances, (in Luke and James), there were even wealthy members in these communities (1984:31-55). The issue which arises in Stegemann's argument is the interpretation of the gospel documents. He uses and argues for a "sociohistorical interpretation of the biblical texts" (1984:59), in which the focus is not only on the faith of the Christian community but also on the life of the faithful.

> ...the preaching of Jesus becomes plain only in its relation to his activity and his life, and its defined circumstances, and to the life of his first followers in Palestine....Bartimaeus, and all those figures of misery who could identify with his plight, not only believed in Jesus of Nazareth, Son of David,...but he, and they, also experienced Jesus as the one who shows mercy even to the

> miserable....It is not possible for us to perceive the saving revelation of God in Jesus Christ...*in isolation from the way it was manifested concretely in time and space*. Faith in the Messiah, Christian faith, is more than the *faithful* identification of one person as the Messiah/Christ; it is also an identification with the program represented by this person (1984:56,59).

The relevance of Stegemann's argument is that it challenges the inclination to interpret Christian faith *only* in the light of the witness of the early Christian community, and neglects the witness of the life of the first followers of Jesus. Irrespective of whether Stegemann's reading of the early historical situation can be sustained in all details, its overall point is valid. Our understanding of the faith is dependent on the life of Jesus of Nazareth and his first followers in which we see life among the poor and commitment to the cause of the poor. If this is neglected the invariable result is a "spiritualization" of faith and loss of historical perspective.15 The biblical tradition is lost and it becomes easy to impose a "culture of affluence" back onto the original records. People in these cultures need to awaken to the historical gap that separates them from the gospel context. Stegemann says:

> ...our existence is so determined by the material conditions of our life that we will only misunderstand the biblical texts unless we appreciate the historical distance separating us from these texts and the world they portray.
>
> When on the other hand, "the little people" in Solentiname, El Salvador, or the Philipines read the Gospels, they learn something about themselves. They are not separated from the tradition of discipleship to Jesus inside or beyond the Palestine of that time by the "loathesome gulf" of history. The biblical traditions reflect substantially the same reality of hunger and poverty, oppression and violence that they encounter daily in the flesh. Critical self-examination should tell us, therefore that the following sarcastic remarks by Soren Kierkegaard are also aimed at us:
>
> > In the magnificent cathedral the Honorable and Right Reverend Geheime-General-Oberhof-Pradikant, the elect favorite of the fashionable world, appears before an elect company and preaches with emotion, upon the text which he himself elected: "God has elected the

> base things of the world and the things that are despised" - and nobody laughs (1984:58).

It is in this context that the gospel is seen not only as good news *to* the poor but as the good news *of* the poor. The poor are not only the recipients of the gospel, they become its heralds, for it is through them that the original meaning of the gospel is learned. This is a particular challenge to the conservative evangelical view which sees the poor only in terms of the ethical application of the gospel and denies their significance in its theological formulation.

3.9. Concern for the Poor in the Life of the Church

As we move beyond the Synoptic gospels we find less explicit reference to the situation of the poor in other New Testament materials. There are however some indications of continuing concern for the poor in Christian communities and teaching.

3.9.1. The Communal Sharing of the Early Church

Two passages in Acts (Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37) refer to the Jerusalem Christians selling their possessions and living in a coummunity where "all believers were together and had everything in common" (2:44). This involved a surrender of claims to private ownership for "no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had" (4:32). It seems that part of the motivation for this was the presence of those who were very poor among them who by this sharing had their needs met for we read that because of this "there were no needy persons among them" (4:34). The principle at work here was "from everyone according to their ability to everyone according to their needs" (Kirk 1983:73).

It is sometimes said that this was an experiment which failed, but nothing within the text suggests that this was regarded in the New

Testament as a practice which had to be abandoned because it proved unworkable. On the contrary it is placed within the context of a worshipping community filled with the Holy Spirit living in the new flush of an experience of God's grace. I find it significant that this occurs at a high point in the life of the church, suggesting that it indicates an ideal and practice which well expresses the meaning of Christian fellowship. Therefore, this communal sharing is not be regarded as an aberration in the life of the church, but rather as a norm in which the Spirit-filled community expresses both its rejection of greed and commitment to the poor. The fact that this appeared as a voluntary practice and that there is no record of its recurrence in other New Testament communities suggests that this may be seen as one, but not the only way for the expression of the Christian *koinonia*. This communal experience does indicate however, that the ideal of a socialistically organised society can be seen to be compatible with the expression of Christian values, for the concept of sharing lies closer to the heart of these values than does the concept of private property. What is important is to discern that such sharing exists as an expression of practical identification with the poor. Whatever form this may take, such solidarity is, I believe, an established and continuing biblical principle and an expression of the presence of the kingdom of God. In the early Christian community according to Mott, "it was not possible to tolerate a situation in which some had much and others had little or nothing at all" (1982:97).

3.9.2. Paul's Collection for the Poor

In Romans 15:26 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 we read of a collection organized by Paul for the relief of "the poor among the saints at Jerusalem". He tells that on his first visit to the Jerusalem church he had explained his mission to James, Peter and John, who recognizing his calling to the Gentiles, had agreed to his continuing to do this: "All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor,the very thing I was eager to do" (Galatians 2:10).

Related to this collection is Paul's explanation of it in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 in which an exposition of generous Christian giving is provided. At the heart of this teaching and exhortation lies his statement: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). It is important to note that central to his motivating appeal is the reference to God's self-emptying in Christ. This is to be emulated by the believers addressed, a concept implying a form of identification with the poor in which those who have share with the "have nots". The context presents a pattern of living where concern is diverted from personal accumulation to concern for the welfare of those who lack. This reflects the teaching of Jesus concerning material possessions and the values of the kingdom he inaugurated. The ideal expressed by Paul is that of an equality in which resources will be shared. "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality" (2 Corinthians 8:13). Against this background it is not possible to interpret the expression of verse 9 "that you ...might become rich", in the way that proponents of the "prosperity teaching" take it, that is "that you might become materially wealthy". Being rich in this context means giving in the way that God has given and aiming at an equalization of resources. "From Jesus' life, Paul picks the quality we would call solidarity. By making himself poor, Jesus opted to enrich those who were sunk in poverty. The riches he brought to them in this way would not be the sort of riches that distinguish the rich from the poor, but simply equality for all" (Pixley, Boff 1989:69).

3.9.3. The Letter of James

In James there is a very clear expression of solidarity with the poor and an attack on the rich for their exploitation of poor workers. James 1:9-11, 2:1-7, 14-17, and 5:1-6 are passages which reflect this perspective. According to Hanks it is in James that

we see the New Testament continuity of the biblical theology of oppression of the Old Testament (1983:45).

> Now listen you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you (James 5:1-6).

This is a passage which makes a strong statement concerning the relationship between the rich and the poor. Its emphasis may be formulated in the following ways.

(1) Here we have a strong condemnation of a wealth which exists at the expense of poverty. The judgment on the rich in verse one is seen to stem from their exploitation of workers referred to in verse four.

(2) Here also is a strong emphasis on the role of oppression as a cause of poverty. Hanks writes: "James places himself firmly in the ranks of the prophets who viewed oppression as the *basic reason* for poverty....Never does he shift the blame to the poor themselves, because of racial inferiority, laziness, vices, or other reasons. The rich bear the basic guilt, because they exploit and oppress" (1983:46).

(3) Here we find a strong revulsion at the violence which victimizes the poor. In verse six the rich are accused of the murder of the poor. This appears to be a metaphorical expression of the destructive effects of the exploitation the poor experience. It causes them to cry out (verse 4), and God hears.

(4) Here we also have a strong sympathy for the poor and antipathy against the rich. The poor are seen in James as those whose dis-

advantaged situation calls forth the support of God, whereas the rich are viewed as exploiters. This clearly reveals a biblical bias for the poor, a theological perspective to be considered at a later stage in this thesis.

The viewpoint on poverty in James is one whose radicality is often denied or ignored by mainline evangelicals. The neglect of this kind of emphasis is illustrated in a story from Ron Sider.

> I read sometime ago that Upton Sinclair, the author, read this passage (James 5:1-5)...to a group of ministers, then he attributed the passage to Emma Goldman, who at the time was an anarchist agitator. The ministers were idignant, and their response was, "this woman ought to be deported at once" (1977:118).

Very clearly the emphasis of James is one in which the poor occupy a central position and his perspective one which reflects the view of the oppressed rather than the oppressor.

3.10. The Bible in General Reflects God's Special Interest in the Poor

These considerations of "The Bible and the Poor" have uncovered a major biblical emphasis which can be summarized in various ways. In the following section I include two segments from the writings of Sider and Gutierrez both of which, I believe, are valuable reflections of the overall biblical teaching on this theme. They focus on two major factors concerning poverty. First, God sides with the poor. Second, poverty is an evil. Obviously, these are two inseparable themes for they reveal God's holy justice and love both as an opposition to all evil (including poverty) and as a concern for those who are its victims.

The concept of God's special interest in the poor is developed by Sider in the following themes: God identifies with the poor (Proverbs 14:31; 19:7; 2 Cor.8:8; Matt. 2:13-15; 8:10; 25:35-40); the poor are God's special instruments (1 Cor.1:26-29; James 2:1-

7); God lifts up the poor but brings down the mighty (Luke 1:46-53; 1 Sam. 2:2-8; Luke 6:20-25; James 5:3-5; Is. 3:14-25); and God's concern should be ours (Ex. 22:21-24; Luke 14:12-14; Is. 1:10-15; 3-7; Amos 5:21-24) (1977:61-77). "The Bible clearly and repeatedly teaches that God is at work in history casting down the rich and exalting the poor because frequently the rich are wealthy because they have oppressed the poor or have neglected to aid the needy" (1977:76).

This same biblical thrust is emphasized by Gustavo Gutierrez. Poverty, he says, is condemned by the prophets whose fingers are pointed at those who are to blame for it.

> Fraudulent commerce and exploitation are condemned (Hos. 12:8; Amos 8:5; Mic. 6:10-11; Is. 3:14; Jer.5:27; 6:12), as well as the hoarding of lands (Mic. 2:1-3; Ezek. 22:29; Hab. 2:5-6), dishonest courts (Amos 5:7; Jer. 22:13-17; Mic. 3:9-11; Isa. 5:23, 10:1-2), the violence of the ruling classes (2 Kings 23:30,35; Amos 4:1; Mic. 3:1-2; 6:12; Jer. 22:13-17), slavery (Neh. 5:1-5; Amos 2:6; 8:6), unjust taxes (Amos 4:1; 5:11-12), and unjust functionaries (Amos 5:7; Jer. 5:28). In the New Testament oppression by the rich is also condemned, especially in Luke (6:24-25; 12:13-21; 16;19-31; 18:18-26) and in the letter of James (2:5-9; 4:13-17; 5:16) (1974:293).

Gutierrez sees three main reasons for the "vigorous repudiation of poverty" in the bible. In the first place it contradicts the very meaning of the Mosaic religion. Moses led Israel out of captivity and exploitation that they might live in freedom and dignity. A second reason is that the slavery of poverty goes against the creation mandate of Genesis (1:26; 2:15) through which humankind is made in God's image to dominate the earth. The third reason is that humanity made in God's image is seen as a sacrament of God. To oppress the poor is to offend God himself for we meet God in our encounter with people, "what is done for others is done for the Lord" (1974:294-295).

4. Conclusions

Within this chapter I have attempted to identify the poor by focussing on their contemporary context as we know it in South Africa and on the biblical text. In this procedure a methodological point is being made, namely that Christian understanding is derived from scripture as it is read in given historical contexts. An emphasis on biblical authority, though crucial for evangelicals, must not be divorced from the emphasis that this authority functions within certain historical contexts which influence the way in which the bible is read. This is an important aspect of biblical understanding which will be developed at a later stage in this thesis.

The identity of the poor and perceptions relating to it in this chapter may, in conclusion, be formulated as follows.

(1) The poor are those who are deprived of life's physical necessities and subjected to social and political oppression.

(2) Within South Africa the experience of poverty is related to the policy of apartheid coupled to this society's history of economic oppression which have together exploited and victimized especially the majority black population.

(3) In the bible poverty and oppression are major themes. Through the terminology used and the way in which various sections of scripture speak to the issue, the poor in the bible appear as those who suffer material deprivation often because of the oppression to which they are subjected. This interpretation of the biblical texts is in line with the earlier definition given in the first section of this chapter.

(4) This biblical view of poverty must not be robbed of its concrete relevance by attempts to spiritualize its meaning. Nor must the original meaning of "the good news for the poor" be lost by emphasis on later universal understandings. Conservative evangelicals have often been guilty on both these scores, by spiritualizing

biblical references to poverty and by neglecting the original context in their interpretation of the gospel.

(5) The discussion of poverty within this chapter has, I believe, established that it is a crucial category both for understanding the reality of our South African context and for establishing what a Christian response to this situation should be. This constitutes a particular challenge for evangelicals who, despite their commitment to biblical authority, have often neglected this major biblical theme. Part of the motivation of this thesis is to establish that faithfulness to the biblical witness demands a Christian understanding in which the poor are a central category for theology and mission. This involves the recasting of aspects of evangelical theology and missiology in the light of a full appreciation of the poor.

NOTES

1 This refers to the Catholic Episcopal Conference held at Medellin, Colombia in August 1968. At Medellin the bishops gave their endorsement to the new theology of liberation emerging in Latin America and made "a preferential option for the poor...committing themselves to work for their integral liberation" (Costas 1982:125).

2 *Evangelism and the Poor: A Third World Study Guide*

3 The singular and plural are both used here to indicate that we may speak of the poor as one universal class or in more local terms as classes whose marginalization may have varied socio-economic and cultural causes and whose experience of oppression may take different forms in different contexts.

4 This is reflected in the volume *Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge* by Francis Wilson and Mamphele Ramphele. This significant work, published in 1989, brings together a large collection of materials on Southern African poverty and is the fruit of many years of research by a wide range of South Africans of all races. Its primary focus is on South Africa, but it also reflects the interlocking character of the region and refers to adjoining countries such as Mozambique, Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland, whose economies are dependent on South Africa.

This work is, I believe, an eminently suitable resource for the consideration of South African poverty. It represents up to date scientific research into the problem in this region and boldly tackles it head on as a profoundly political issue. It is a mine

of information, but is far more than a statistical handbook for it sees poverty in its historic and socio-political contexts and addresses its causes and suggests strategies to combat them. This work provides a portrait of the South African poor in terms of both deprivation and oppression and is therefore relevant to the perspectives which lie at the heart of this thesis.

All references in the text for the rest of this section will refer to this work by Wilson and Ramphele unless otherwise indicated.

5 A book which relates to this topic is *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* by Colin Bundy. This criticizes the common view that in pre-colonial times African agriculture was inherently backward and that today's lack of development and poverty is a result of this African "traditionalism". It shows that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century economic development was hostile to the existence of these peasants, and how a massive onslaught was launched on them.

6 "The highest recorded is 67 kg. but few more than 50kg. The most representative survey of the rural reserve areas of the country found women collecting an average headload of 30 kg."

7 The 1980 income statistics for racial divisions are as follows:

White	64.9% of income	15% of population
Asian	3.0%	3%
Coloured	7.2%	9%
African	24.9%	73%

At the time of the 1985 census the total population of South Africa (including the so-called independent homelands) was 33.7 million of whom 25 million were African; 4.9 million were white; 2.9 million were coloured; and 0.9 million were Asian

8 The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) Consultation on World Evangelization held in Pattaya, Thailand in 1980. Statements concerning the poor are from the Draft Report *Christian Witness to the Urban Poor*.

9 I believe that there is a need for the whole issue of the biblical teaching on the poor to be addressed by competent evangelical biblical scholars. Although the work of scholars like Thomas Hanks and Harvey Perkins is of value more needs to be done in terms of comprehensive studies of the whole theme.

10 *God so Loved the Third World*. A similar helpful work is that by his colleague in biblical studies at the *Seminario Biblico Latinamericano* in San Jose, Costa Rica, Elsa Tamez entitled *Bible of the Oppressed*.

11 "The Poor and Oppressed - The Focus of Christian Participation in Human Development" in *Evangelism and the Poor* edited by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden.

12 *The Gospel and the Poor*

13 *God so Loved the Third World*

14 Similar expressions to those in Isaiah and Amos are found in Jeremiah 7:8-10, Micah 6:6-8, and Hosea 6:6.

15 An example of the result of ignoring the significance of the life situation of Jesus' first followers is seen in D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' comments on the Sermon on the Mount: "The Jews had a false materialistic conception of the kingdom. They thought the Messiah was one who was coming to give them political emancipation....They always thought of the kingdom in an external sense....the great purpose of this Sermon is to give an exposition of the kingdom as something which is essentially spiritual. The kingdom is primarily something 'within you'" (1959:16). Lloyd Jones' critique of Jewish "materialism" is somewhat ironic when his own thought so clearly reflects Greek dualism.

CHAPTER THREE

RADICAL EVANGELICALISM AND THE POOR: A SURVEY

In the two preceding chapters we have considered the nature of radical evangelicalism and the identity of the poor. Now we need to focus on the place occupied by "the poor" in radical evangelical thinking. Although a renewed concern for the poor is seen generally in evangelical thinking, it is particularly within the radical constituency that this is of central significance.

In this chapter important formulations of key theologians, missiologists, and social activists will be considered and arranged in a topical format. This survey will be restricted to those considered to be radical evangelicals, except of course where others may be cited for purposes of comparison, or where evangelicalism in general is referred to. It is my contention that the materials surveyed demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that within radical evangelicalism commitment to the poor is a primary characteristic. It is acknowledged that this survey cannot be said to provide a complete picture of the radical movement. Its impreciseness and the diffuseness of its sources make any such claim unrealistic. It is, nevertheless, my submission that the sources referred to constitute a sufficiently significant and representative segment of radical evangelical thought to justify the argument that, taken together, they demonstrate that the movement is characterized by commitment to the poor.

This chapter is, however, not only descriptive, it also implicitly contains an argument for the normative character of commitment to the poor for radical evangelicalism. There are two aspects to this normative character which need to be noted.

First, the survey indicates that there is a *theological* perspective on "the poor" that appears in recent radical evangelical thinking.

In their cumulative effect the sources cited point towards this theology of the poor as a central feature of radical evangelicalism. This is an assessment backed not only by the topical arrangement of this chapter and the definition offered in the previous chapter, but also by further arguments to be advanced in later chapters. It needs to be stressed that the survey indicates not only an "interest in" or "concern for" the poor, but more importantly a perspective in which "the poor" are a theological category of crucial importance for understanding and action. The perspectives on the poor emerging in this thesis are therefore reflective of a theological development in current radical evangelicalism.

Second, it is my intention to use this survey as a means for formulating a theology of the poor which is in accord with the main lines of radical evangelical thought yet which also expresses the shape I believe this theology should take. Thus when I speak of a "radical evangelical theology of the poor" I am referring to formulations of this theology which I am developing in this thesis which seek to remain in harmony with radical perspectives but for which I alone am responsible. These formulations will appear more particularly in the chapters following the "survey". In some cases issues will be briefly raised in the "survey" and then receive more adequate attention at a later stage.1

Within the overall framework of this project this survey functions as a background and source of material for theologizing by providing evidence of radical and contextual evangelical concerns and formulations related to the poor. Seen in this way this chapter is, I believe, crucial for the development of my thesis for it highlights the seldom recognized fact that a perspective exists in evangelicalism which places the poor at the centre of its theology.

1. A Growing Awareness of the Poor in Recent Evangelical Theology

An example of this growing awareness is seen in a recent statement by Philip Capp2 concerning "transformational leadership". He speaks of the view that all things in the universe belong to God and says:

> We also believe this means rejecting the alliance of the Church with the rich and the powerful to reinforce and preserve their privilege. It means seeing anew that the God of Biblical revelation judges leadership in terms of results for those who are described as "poor and oppressed". Justice and righteousness are not God's justice and righteousness unless the poor and oppressed are empowered with dignity as persons made in the image of God and enabled to become participating subjects of their own history instead of objects of someone else's history (EBSemSA 1989:1).

I see this statement as significant because it reveals a kind of thinking which was unknown in South African evangelical seminaries ten to fifteen years ago. Despite the fact that these sentiments may not be representative of all South African evangelical seminaries or Bible Colleges, the climate is changing and there are indications that an awareness of the importance of "the poor" is beginning to dawn.

Within the worldwide evangelical family acknowledgement of the place of the poor has been expressed in various ways.

In the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) Consultation on World Evangelization in Thailand, 1980, part of the Draft Report from *Christian Witness to the Urban Poor* states:

> Through our ministry and mission in urban areas we had known the reality of poverty and its debilitating, dehumanizing consequences worldwide. We had known too, the problem of riches, the great gap between rich and poor, and the often ruthless exercise of power which reduces people to poverty and keeps them in it. What we had not known, and what has shaken us to see, is the amount of space devoted in scripture to the poor and to

> God's dealings with them and for them (Samuel, Sugden 1983:45).

In March 1980 the LCWE in conjunction with the World Evangelical Fellowship sponsored an International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle. Part of "The Commitment" from this Consultation reads:

> We affirm that involuntary poverty is an offense against the goodness of God. It is related in the Bible to powerlessness, for the poor cannot protect themselves. God's call to rulers is to use their power to defend the poor, not to exploit them. The church must stand with God and the poor against injustice, suffer with them and call on rulers to fulfill their God-appointed role (Sider 1982:14).

In the General Preface Sider says: "An historic transformation is in process. In all parts of the world, evangelical Christians in growing numbers are rediscovering the biblical summons to serve the poor, minister to the needy, correct injustice and seek societal shalom". (1982:1)

In the Lausanne 2 Congress held in July 1989 in the Philippines a Statement entitled "The Manila Manifesto" was issued. Part of this reads:

> We have again been confronted with Luke's emphasis that the gospel is good news for the poor...and have asked ourselves what this means to the majority of the world's population who are destitute suffering or oppressed. We have been reminded that the law, the prophets and the wisdom books, and the ministry and teaching of Jesus all stress God's concern for the materially poor and our consequent duty to defend and care for them. Scripture also refers to the spiritually poor who look to God alone for mercy. The gospel comes as good news to both. The spiritually poor, who, whatever their economic circumstances, humble themselves before God, receive by faith the free gift of salvation. There is no other way for anybody to enter the Kingdom of God. The materially poor and powerless find in addition a new dignity as God's children and the love of brothers and sisters who will struggle with them for their liberation from everything which demeans or oppresses them.
>
> We repent of any neglect of God's truth in Scripture and determine both to proclaim and to defend it. We also repent where we have been indifferent to the plight of

> the poor, and where we have shown preference for the rich, and we determine to follow Jesus in preaching good news to all people by both word and deed (1989:4).

In a recent publication John Tooke shared his impressions of the Lausanne 2 Congress in Manila saying that seven strong trends in evangelistic thinking emerged. "The first is that evangelism has to be strongly related to the poor and the social context" (Africa Enterprise 1989:1).

These references clearly indicate that a new awareness of the poor has developed in recent years in the general evangelical community, particularly in the so-called "Lausanne movement". As we shall see however, it is particularly in its radical wing that evangelicalism is beginning to work through some of the theological and missiological implications of this awareness.

2. Post-Lausanne Third World Missiology and the Context of the Poor

Chris Sugden in an essay entitled "Evangelicals and Wholistic3 Evangelism" has outlined some of the evangelical theological developments following the 1974 Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne (1989:29-51). He refers to the effect of the Congress papers on evangelism presented by Rene Padilla and Samuel Escobar4 as triggering an explosion of evangelical involvement in relief and development as well as missiology. Their papers differed from the usual evangelical approach to evangelism which ignores the effect of context on the presentation of the gospel. Instead they warned of the dangers of individualism, materialism and North American "culture Christianity" (Padilla); and pointed to the need for a holistic focus (Escobar). According to Sugden they lit "the blue touch paper for evangelical social responsibility this century....There was an explosion in their own international ministries as some responded positively to their challenge and invited them to talk further, and others decisively pushed them out into the cold" (1989:30). The Congress signalled a new move towards

holistic mission and evangelism in which representatives from third world countries played a leading role.

The Lausanne Covenant affirmed social involvement as part of the mission of the church, but for some it did not go far enough. It stated in paragraph 5 "Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty". This failed to "make the point that social responsibility was more than an implication of the gospel; it was an intrinsic part of the expression of the good news itself" (Sugden 1989:33). In response to these perceptions a group of about 200 people met during the Congress and issued a statement known as the "Radical Discipleship Statement". This strongly affirmed the holistic nature of the gospel itself: "It is Good News of liberation, of restoration, of wholeness, and of salvation that is personal, social, global and cosmic" (1989:33). The key issue related to the content of the gospel traditionally proclaimed by evangelicals, its relationship to contexts in which it was proclaimed and the effect these had on its formulation. "The Lausanne Covenant and the Radical Discipleship Statement set an agenda leading from Lausanne. The first item was the relationship between the context in which the gospel was proclaimed and the content of the gospel" (1989:34-35).

This emphasis on context is highly significant in the development of the movement of holistic mission emerging from Lausanne. It signalled a growing third world influence in world evangelicalism which led to the challenging of rigid Western formulations of the gospel which had too easily been imposed in missionary situations in previous generations.

In the next major Consultation arranged by the LCWE at Pattaya, Thailand in 1980, a strong emphasis on reaching "people groups" emerged. This emphasis while holding potential for a more holistic

approach was deemed inadequate by some because the context of these groups was defined mainly in terms of religious affiliation. Contexts relating to social justice were largely neglected. Consequently a group of third world theologians and some from the West met and drafted a "Statement of Concerns" in which the scope of people-groups was widened to include, social, economic and political situations. This was signed by about one third of the participants at the Consultation. According to Sugden an awareness of context was decisive in this development, it was the "result of reading the Bible from the perspective of contexts other than those dominated by western individualism. Wholistic evangelism was about sharing the gospel with communities and groups of people at that point that the good news of the kingdom challenged the group in view" (1989:37).

It is significant that at both Lausanne and Pattaya groups representing third world missiological perspectives met and issued statements which challenged Western theological formulations.

According to Sugden third world evangelicals were alerted to a problem at Pattaya. It related to the reluctance of the Consultation organizers to allow the airing of their missiological concerns on the conference programme and an inclination to restrict the Consultation to discussions circumscribed by a "missiology and agenda emanating from North America" (1989:37). Orlando Costas has alluded to the same problem, particularly the unresponsiveness of the LCWE Executive Committee to the "Statement of Concerns" and its recommendations.

> In my considered opinion the LCWE's response to the Statement of Concerns raises a very serious question of integrity on the part of the LCWE. Indeed it reflects a subtle cop-out from the scandalous situation in which evangelism finds itself in many parts of the world, and verifies the Statement of Concerns' contention that the LCWE has not been "seriously concerned with the social, political and economic issues in many parts of the world that are a great stumbling block to the proclamation of the Gospel" (Costas 1982:144).

Sugden tells how the formulators of the Statement of Concerns met around a coffee table late one night and resolved to meet again as a "Two Thirds World consultation. They did not reject partnership with Western Christians....they wanted to build that partnership on a proper basis of equality and mutuality....in place of dominance and subservience" (1989:38).

The outcome was the "First Consultation of Evangelical Mission Theologians from the Two Thirds World" which was held at Bangkok in March 1982. In its report it emphasized the fact that third world agendas for theology must spring from third world contexts (1989:38).

According to Sugden the conference had a number of offspring. The first was a series of further consultations. The second, a closer network of "evangelical mission theologians from the Two Thirds World," which culminated in 1987 in the formation of The International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians. The third was the formation of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (1989:38-39).

These developments signal the formation and growth of an evangelical movement whose existence was necessitated by perceived needs to formulate the gospel contextually, which needs were not adequately recognized by traditional Western evangelical theologies and theologians. In addition to the factor of context, evangelical theologies flowing from Lausanne and finding particular expression in third world contexts stimulated major involvement in development. This thrust was shown especially in the Wheaton Consultation on the Church in Response to Human Need in 1983 (1989:41-43).

It was along these two roads, the recognition of context and involvement in development, that evangelicals travelled to a point where the situation of the poor moved to a more prominent position in mission and theology. Increasing awareness of the poor was in evidence at both Lausanne and Pattaya, but this has been ex-

emplified more especially among radical evangelicals. A study group in early 1981 in Bangalore India, followed by a workshop of the Fifth Conference of the International Association for Mission Studies at the same venue in January 1982, reflected the growing importance of the poor for evangelical theology. Sugden writes:

> This focus on the poor was a very significant development. It raised the issue that the poor had a claim on the mission of the church not just from the point of view of being a) the objects of social responsibility or b) included in the general command to evangelise all. It raised the point that of all the people-groups that the church had to reach, of all the contexts and cultures in which the gospel was to be formulated, the people-group, context and culture of the poor had a prior claim and actually was to be the determinative people-group context and culture for formulating the meaning and methods of sharing the gospel....This actually changes the key in which wholistic evangelism takes place (1989:44).

Awakening to the holistic mission of the church and contextual awareness led, in the radical evangelical community, to a commitment to the poor with its accompanying theological implications. It is important to note from Post-Lausanne developments that these concerns often occur together.

In March 1987 a group composed mainly of evangelicals gathered at Stuttgart to consider the place of evangelism in the programme of the World Council of Churches. They issued the Stuttgart Statement on Evangelism.5 Sugden makes two comments concerning this Statement and adds supportive quotes. First, it strongly affirms the importance of context in evangelism:

> There are different entry points for the love of God into the lives of people, both as individuals and as communities....it has to be emphasized that we can only communicate the gospel to people if we open ourselves to them and enable them to open themselves to us. This means that listening to them is crucial in the sharing of the gospel with them; we cannot share the gospel without sharing ourselves (1989:45).

Second, evangelism can never be separated from justice:

> The Church's evangelistic ministry can never be detached from its other ministries. If the Church chooses to remain silent in the face of injustice and oppression, both in society at large and in the Church itself, it jeopardises its entire evangelistic ministry. These concerns - which Scripture consistently summarizes as the plight of the widow, the orphan, the alien and the poor - are inseparably related to evangelism and every effort to drive a wedge between them is to be rejected as the proclamation of a spurious gospel (1989:45).

Although the question of the poor is not explicitly addressed in the Statement, the terms in which evangelism is conceived implicitly raise the issue. Sugden comments: "Such evangelism will take the contexts of poverty and powerlessness seriously....It will see such contexts as the authentic contexts which raise the issues which the Good News of the Kingdom addresses" (1989:46).

The Stuttgart Statement is important because it represents the most up to date radical evangelical statement on evangelism. It includes items not normally considered in evangelical statements on evangelism such as its integral and contextual nature, and also an acknowlegment of a genuine knowledge of God (albeit incomplete) outside of the Christian revelation (Stuttgart Statement 1989:221). It represents a much smaller constituency than the "Manila Manifesto" and is more restricted in its scope, focussing only on evangelism. It shows a new, more open, and less triumphalistic way of thinking about evangelism which contrasts with some of the more strictly particularistic emphases in traditional evangelicalism.

Reference has already been made to the 1989 "Manila Manifesto". This document comprises two parts: Twenty-one briefly stated Affirmations, followed by twelve sections in which the themes introduced are elaborated. The two congress themes, "Proclaim Christ until he comes" and "Calling the Whole Church to take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World" are expressed in the Manifesto. There is no direct reference to the poor in the Affirmations, although points 8 and 9 come close in referring to deprived people in need of care, and denunciation of injustice and oppression.

In the Manifesto the poor are seen as part of the world to which the gospel must be brought. They are important because they compose such a large constituency to be reached with the gospel and because the relief of their human plight is a Christian ethical imperative. In the overall emphasis of the Manifesto, service to the poor is subservient to the major missiological imperative which is evangelism. "Evangelism is primary because our chief concern is with the gospel, that all people may have the opportunity to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior" (1989:5). This proclamation must be accompanied by good works in which the service of the poor is included. The major impression conveyed in the document is the urgency of the task of world evangelization. It stands clearly within the LCWE tradition in which commitment to the poor is seen as a social outcome of the gospel rather than an integral part of it. The concept of the poor is a matter of ethical application rather than theological perception. They are not seen as significant in the definition of the nature of the gospel. It is on this issue of the theological significance of the poor that radical evangelicals part company with the dominant tradition. In this respect the mainline evangelical tradition fails to recognise the influence of context on the understanding of the gospel.

The effect of this non-contextual approach at the congress is reflected by Mbulelo Hina of Africa Enterprise in his critique of Lausanne 2.

> For Mbulelo, now living as he does close to the poverty of his people in the townships of Natal, the concentration of the congress tended to be on the needs of the First World instead of the Third.
>
> "Coming from South Africa, I became aware of the concentration on First World initiatives in the congress. It was not prepared for Third World people", he said. "That discouraged me"....
>
> "They didn't seem to understand the need to evangelise the whole hungry man, not just his soul. I expect I felt that way because I came from a poverty background and the leadership did not. So poverty was not the most important thing to them; it was evangelising the empty stomachs" (Africa Enterprise 1989).

Developments since Lausanne 1974 clearly point the way to a more contextual theology and missiology in which " the poor" occupy a crucial position not only as objects of the church's mission but in terms of theological definition. This emphasis associated with radical evangelicalism emerges more clearly in the following section with its theological and hermenutical focus.

3. Third World Contextual Theology and Hermeneutics

A major factor in the development of a radical evangelical theology of the poor is the thinking emerging from third world evangelical sources. This thinking reflects first hand experience in contexts of poverty and involves methods of biblical interpretation and forms of theological expression which challenge traditional Western evangelical formulations. A good example of this is the theology of Vinay Samuel. This is interpreted in a valuable exposition found in the doctoral thesis of Chris Sugden his one-time pastoral colleague who has worked in close collaboration with him for a considerable period.6 This work of Sugden's is a major source that will be used in assessing the contribution of Samuel in this thesis. In interpreting Vinay Samuel this work of Chris Sugden is of unique importance because the major portion of Samuel's writing has been done in conjunction with Sugden.7 Therefore the degree to which Sugden is used as a facilitator in the understanding of Samuel's thought in this thesis is, I believe, justified. According to Sugden his "writings are a significant body of evangelical reflection on mission among the poor and among Hindus" (1988:224).

3.1. The Gospel Defined by what it means to the Poor in Scripture

Vinay Samuel is a presbyter of the Church of South India working in a slum area of Bangalore for whom actual involvement with poor people rather than a prior social analysis demonstrates a bias on

their behalf. His theological reflection on the relation of the gospel to the poor arises from his mission practice among them.8 He takes the warning of Abbe Pierre to students in Bombay seriously: "If you know everything without knowing the misery of those who suffer, you will be - with all your knowledge - disastrous leaders for tomorrow" (1988:227-229).

In Samuel's theology

> ...the meaning of the gospel to the poor in scripture defines the meaning of the good news for everybody....the very meaning of what God does is defined by what he does among the poor in scripture. This means that if the church wants to know the mind and will of God for its obedience, it must listen to what God did among the poor in scripture, see what he is doing to bring his kingdom among poor people now, discover the meaning of the good news for them and shape its own agenda by the agenda of the poor (1988:231).

Sugden further describes Samuel's view of the poor as the focus of God's work by recounting a shared conversation:

> The focus on the poor demonstrates the nature of the reality of the gospel which is meant for all. In the Old Testament the grace of God is universally and truly available for all. But its reality and its true nature is to be revealed in what it means to Israel. In the New Testament, the poor replace Israel as the focus of the gospel. As the poor are called; as the multitude rejoice and experience the gospel, the real nature of the gospel becomes evident to others. This in no way means that the gospel is not for other groups. It does mean that it has to be mediated through what it means to the poor. Its fullness could only be appreciated when its nature was revealed through this marginalised group (1988:232).

These important quotes highlight the following key elements in Samuel's theology of the poor.

(1) The poor are seen as a type of lens through which the meaning of the gospel is understood. While the gospel is for everyone its meaning is mediated through its significance to the poor. Although he does not use the term, his emphasis points to the poor as being heralds of the good news for it is through them that the meaning of

the gospel is spread to all. In an interesting parallel Samuel likens this mediatorial role of the poor in the New Testament to that of Israel in the Old Testament as mediator of God's universal grace.

(2) This concept is derived from biblical sources in which God is seen to be active in a special way among the poor. It must be noted that Samuel's theology comprises a strong emphasis on the importance of biblical sources for a theology of the poor, it is "the meaning of the gospel to the poor *in scripture*" (my emphasis) which is determinative for him.

(3) As God was active among the poor in scripture so today his action related to his kingdom is specially evident among the poor. This special activity of God (both in biblical and modern settings) provides an exposition of the gospel and an agenda for the whole church.

3.2. The Bible best understood by the Poor

In evaluating differences between his view of providence and that of the church in the West, Samuel refers to the differences in their two contexts. While the theological views of all people are shaped by their contexts, and the process of doing theology requires an intercontextual reading of scripture, this does not mean that all contexts are equally valid. There are normative criteria which determine that the theology shaped in one context is likely to be more valid than that shaped in another context. For Samuel "the ultimate criterion is that theology shall be an objective expression of scripture as scripture". In scripture by his definition of the gospel as good news to the poor Jesus defined the gospel by its relationship to the poor (1988:319).

> So Samuel could be understood to mean that the biblical criteria of any valid interpretation of the gospel is that it must have a relationship to the poor, defined by the New Testament, and that those in a situation of

> poverty are more likely to have such a relationship than those who live in affluent circumstances. This does not rule out the possibility that those in affluent circumstances may correctly interpret scripture, but they cannot do that without a relationship to people in the context of poverty (1988:320).

Thus Samuel sees a need for an intercontextual reading of scripture in which partnership between third world and Western churches is appropriate. In this partnership people from affluent contexts can be helped in their understanding of the bible by the interpretations of those in contexts of poverty. For him, partnership issues, according to Sugden,

> ...are not merely or even primarily issues of sharing of economic resources. They are issues of relationships which are necessary to enable authentically biblical theology to emerge. The theologies that assert that redemption is only spiritual, that God works in creation separately from his work in Christ, and that social action is a hindrance to evangelism are to Samuel examples of what happens when this does not happen and instead the views of those who live in affluent contexts become determinative (1988:320-321).

From these materials Samuel seems to be saying that the poor occupy a position of hermeneutical privilege. They are seen to have a role as guides for understanding the biblical message, not in absolute terms for the need for an intercontextual reading of scripture is acknowledged, but as those whose context is less likely to distort biblical understanding. Samuel does not say exactly why the poor are more reliable interpreters than the rich, but his whole argument makes a clear distinction between the two contexts and reveals a distrust of the way in which Western affluent contexts distort biblical interpretation and therefore stand in need of the correctives provided by contexts of poverty. The unspoken inference behind these remarks appears to be, as with Stegemann in the previous chapter, that those in contexts of poverty stand closer to the biblical context associated with the first announcement of the good news by Jesus. The crucial factor for Samuel is that Jesus defined the gospel by its relationship to the poor, and therefore it appears that it is best understood from such contexts.

3.3. A Theology of the Poor Related to the Concept of Human Dignity

This emphasis is particularly developed in Samuel's theology. He is referred to by Sugden as a theologian of dignity, a chapter of his thesis being devoted to this theme.

According to Samuel dignity refers to a sense of self worth and also to the category of identity. Sugden clarifies his usage as follows: "True dignity is a sense of self worth. It therefore requires a sense of identity (a sense of self, of who one is), and a sense of worth (of value) which could come from within oneself or from affirmation by another" (1988:271).

Dignity is closely related to identity as that which is not imposed or denied by others. Samuel refers to the use of "sinner" as a technical term in the New Testament9 by which certain people are marginalized by others. It was a term used to belittle others. This has relevance in a society where poor people have their identity defined by others, where they are considered "impure". Dignity implies a non-dependence on the approval of others for identity (Sugden:1988:273).

Identity also involves the idea of possessing gifts and the sense of worth gained in the opportunity to use these in the service of others. This comes out in Samuel's thought on human development. He refers to a shift of power in the church in which the monopolies of priestly hierarchies are overcome and the laity participate in ministry (Sugden:273-274).

Samuel gives the following definition of dignity:

> Where we see *human dignity* being affirmed and people discovering a sense of self-worth, self-acceptance and a sense of having something to contribute to the world and others, we can see God at work.

> Where we see people *free* to be able to act according to their conscience without threat from others who control their actions and thus their attitudes, we can see God at work....
>
> We can see God at work when women, the weak and the handicapped have a role which accords them dignity and equality, and when their needs receive a priority. We can see God at work when power is shared in such a way that all benefit and none is dehumanized (Sugden 1988:275).

According to Sugden, "dignity...appears to be the key category which Samuel uses for interpreting the gospel among poor people" (1988:270). This, for instance, is the issue he raises in dialogue with other religions. His discussion is based not on philosophical theology, but on religious and ideological questions relating to human dignity and the position of the poor (1988:272).

> How, according to Samuel, is human dignity to be affirmed among those whose dignity has been rubbed out by poverty and the caste system....Our thesis is that Samuel counters poverty and caste with orthodox Christianity. He includes the social dimension in close conjunction with the spiritual dimension to affirm human dignity and self-worth (1988:276).

Samuel's emphasis on context also ties in with this perspective. For him "dignity," says Sugden, "is affirmed as people develop their theology in context" (1988:284). For Samuel dignity involves the recognition that third world theology has a significant contribution to make to the church world wide. He believes that this contribution to the world church is marginalized "because Western theology is blind to the importance of context in theological formulation" (1988:287-288).

These insights of Samuel's on human dignity are relevant for this thesis for they point to a primary factor concerning the evil of oppression inflicted on the poor, that is its dehumanizing quality. It is the factor of human dignity which lies at the heart of the assertion that God sides with the poor. God's special concern with those whose dignity is assaulted by social and political oppression is essentially an affirmation of human worth, the worth of those often considered expendable by society.

In these three areas mentioned above; the definition of the gospel, the interpretation of scripture, and the concept of human dignity, Samuel's theology of the poor is shown in both philosophical and human terms. "The poor" are a category relevant in theological formulation, but they are not an abstraction. Samuel's emphasis on dignity, obviously closely tied to his mission practice, creates a balance which keeps his theology in touch with life. He is not firstly an academic theologian but someone whose work among the poor has come to expression in a theology reflecting his mission activity. I believe that his relevance for an evangelical theology of the poor lies in this balance between reflection and action, and also in his emphasis on dignity which is a key factor underlying alternative formulations of evangelical theology.

3.4. In the Bible God seen as Siding with the Poor and Oppressed

This understanding of biblical theology is a major factor in radical evangelical perspectives on the poor.

We have noted Samuel's emphasis on the gospel being defined by what it means to the poor. Behind this is his view of God having shown himself as siding with the poor. Samuel writes: "God was at work through the servant ministry and lifestyle of Jesus taking the side of the poor and the victims of current injustices to enable them to achieve full humanity" (Samuel 1981:18). He sees a "bias" towards the poor particularly in the life of Jesus.

Taking a broader view Orlando Costas summarizes biblical teaching on this theme thus:

> The Old Testament discloses a God who is opposed to any attempts to subjugate; a God who is on the side of the widow and the orphan, the poor and the stranger; a God who raises the humble and casts down the oppressor; who frees from slavery, demands justice, freedom, and peace. The New Testament witnesses to the incarnation of this mission in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Thus

> Jesus identified with the poor, proclaimed wholeness to the sick, liberty for the captives, and restoration for the marginated and deprived (1982:67).

In the previous chapter we noted Ron Sider's strong emphasis on God's special identification with the poor. These references to Samuel, Costas, and Sider as examples of radical evangelical views of God standing on the side of the poor will be followed in a subsequent chapter by a fuller treatment of this theme.

4. The Recovery of an Older Evangelical Tradition of Concern for the Poor

Mainline evangelicalism in the twentieth century (particularly in its North American expression) has largely been characterized by its support of the rich and powerful over against the poor and oppressed. This orientation is seen by some in the movement of holistic evangelism to be in conflict with earlier tendencies and practices.

4.1. Evangelical Retreat

Some writers see evangelicalism to have retreated from its earlier commitments to the poor. This retreat is associated with the so-called "Great Reversal" in which evangelicalism became absorbed by fundamentalism and from the start of the twentieth century up until the 1960s renounced social responsibility and in so doing gave implicit support to systems serving the interests of the rich and powerful. That there has been a social awakening among evangelicals since then is undeniable, though this has not gone deep enough to affect general tendencies to affirm rather than challenge exploitative and oppressive systems of power.

One of the prophetic voices in evangelicalism is Jim Wallis. He writes concerning the way in which evangelicals have retreated into support of the status quo:

> Does the word evangelical conjure up the vision of a gospel that turns the social order upside down?...The image of American evangelicalism that comes out of their pulpits and goes out over the air waves is a religion for those at the top, not those at the bottom of the world system....
>
> It has not always been so. Evangelical movements in England and the United States have led struggles for the abolition of slavery, for economic justice, and for women's rights. Eighteenth century English preachers and nineteenth century American evangelists deliberately linked revivalism to social change and proclaimed a gospel that was indeed good news to the poor, the captives and the oppressed (1981:56).

David Moberg in his book *The Great Reversal* has made the same point.

> A century ago evangelicals were in the forefront of social concern, but now we have become so identified with "the successful", in terms of this world's ideologies, that we put brakes on nearly every proposal for dealing with social problems in a manner consistent with the realities of our complex urban-industrial world. Instead of helping to alleviate the ills of the poor and underprivileged, we react against those who try to do so. Some even boast, as a prominent evangelical leader did in a major address I heard in September 1967, "With all the clamor about the poor and minorities in our society, it's time someone speaks up in defense of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant Puritans. I'm for the upper dog" (1972:42).

In writings by Donald Dayton and Timothy Smith in particular there has been an endeavour to recover something of the lost heritage of evangelicalism and reflect earlier social concerns.10

4.2. Earlier Ambiguities

In surveying some of the social perspectives of earlier evangelicals it becomes apparent that they displayed many of the failings of their successors. Sometimes strange ambiguities appear, there are clear evidences of identification with the poor yet these often go hand in hand with very elitist and authoritarian attitudes. They were very much children of their time.

One example of this ambiguity is John Wesley. In his book *The Radical Wesley* Howard Snyder devotes a chapter to his "Preaching to the Poor". He notes that in the building of the Methodist system Wesley determined that "preaching the gospel to the poor must take precedence over custom and propriety" (1980:38).

Speaking of the effects of the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century in which John Wesley was a leader, Robert Webber has noted that it produced a social concern for the underprivileged and poor and an insistence on justice in society (1986:157). Wesley himself showed deep social concern, in 1746 opening a free medical dispensary for the poor and in 1785 organizing a Friends Society to help strangers and those in need. He is also noted for his support of prison reform and especially for his opposition to the slave trade (1986:158-159).

Yet these humanitarian tendencies were blunted by some of the limiting factors of his religious and social outlook. An interesting assessment of Wesley's social contribution has been written by George W Forell in which tendencies are revealed which apply to much of evangelicalism-pietism.

> Wesley's social teachings are a peculiar combination of political conservatism and social activism. He shares with other Pietists a tendency to seek individualistic solutions to social evils and to deal with symptoms of prevailing evils rather than their causes. Nevertheless, his influence for change was great. Though Wesley was conservative to the core, his humanitarian interests made Methodism a far more radical force for social change than its founder had anticipated (1966:274).

Michael Paget-Wilkes is another writer who has noted this ambiguity in Wesley and early Methodism (1981:60-61). He sees similar inclinations in what he calls "the evangelical humanitarian group", represented by Wilbeforce, Shaftesbury and the Clapham Sect. "They worked for the poor", he says, "rather than *with* them" (1981:61-62). Speaking of this "evangelical humanitarian group", Paget-Wilkes has said:

> They were completely committed to making the life of the poor easier, yet they were quite happy to accept that the poor were the poor, and saw no reason why they shouldn't continue to remain so. Wilberforce, Shaftesbury, and the rest were upper class people, who believed that God had put people into classes, and that it was therefore wrong to make any changes that would upset the wealth or class structure....Theirs were attempts to alleviate the *extremes* of deprivation, rather than a determined effort to redress the imbalance, which had been created or at least aggravated, by the Industrial Revolution (1981:62).

Another example of ambiguity is David Livingstone. Samuel Escobar has noted Livingstone's role as part of the expansion of British Colonialism. In an address to his home board he said: "I go back to Africa to make an open path for commerce and Christianity". Yet, says Escobar, Livingstone can be seen in a different light. He quotes a review of recent studies about Livingstone against the background of modern Africa.

> Livingstone the missionary, and Livingstone the champion of African freedom, would be no less delighted than astonished at the situation in Africa today. Dr. A.C. Ross the historian...(has) recalled that shortly after Livingstone's home station and most of his possessions had been destroyed by Boer commandos as a reprisal for his support of the Bakwena people, he wrote in a letter to the London Missionary Society: "Everywhere there is a strong feeling of independence springing up. The English, as a nation have lost character and honour. The destruction of my property is a fortunate thing for me. There is not a native in the country but knows now for certain on whose side I am" (1978:41).

This reference to Livingstone raises the issue of the collaboration of missionary and colonial interests in third world situations. This factor in mission history plus the accompanying "theological colonization" in which Western formulations are exported and imposed on indigenous cultures is significant in evangelical mission history.

4.3. Welfare and Social Action

The work of William Booth and the Salvation Army is of particular importance in the tradition of evangelical social concern. In his well-known work *In Darkest England and the Way Out*, Booth described England as "a population sodden with drunks, steeped in vice, eaten up by every social and physical malady" (Webber 1986:160). As leader of an army of righteousness Booth directed his attacks on all the forces, spiritual and social, which he saw to be destroying the lives of particularly the poor masses. Thus the Salvation Army developed its unique blend of "soup and salvation", social and spiritual ministry. "Booth called for the foundation of the rescue mission, shelter stations, food centres, and city and farm colonies as well as the continued preaching of the gospel" (Webber 1986:160). In this holistic ministry the compassion shown by the Salvation Army to the poor and exploited is of particular significance. Booth shows something of this motivation in his words: "We saw the need. We saw the people starving, we saw people going about half-naked, people doing sweated labour; and we set about bringing a remedy for these things. We were obliged - there was a compulsion. How could one do anything else" (Barclay 1971:32)?

Much of this social concern within evangelicalism-pietism is limited, however, by its restricted individualistic vision. While some became aware of the effects of structural evil this was not always the case. Moberg has written of this problem:

> First-hand knowledge of poverty was amalgamated with Christian compassion to deliver many of our evangelical forebears from the devastating interpretation that sees misfortune as solely a product of personal failure and sin.
>
> The reality of "structural poverty" arising out of the very nature of institutional organization in an industrial society did not dawn as early upon others, however. The latter had a strong tendency to see Christian social responsibility only in terms of welfare to alleviate problems that had already arisen, not in terms of social action to get at the causal roots of the problems in an effort to prevent them from claiming more victims. An individualistic and moralistic orientation made them see

> the sources in terms of personal good and evil and blinded them to social causes that could not be attributed directly to individuals. Yet their attempts to speak up for the underprivileged and to protect the interests of the laboring classes marked many of them as champions of the poor (1972:30).

These remarks of Moberg draw attention to the way in which context affects perspective and limits the effects of Christian humanitarian action. This has already been noted in the section on "Earlier Ambiguities".

These inclinations to engage in social welfare but avoid social action are still apparent in the evangelical community. One of the factors influencing this is the tendency to see sin in personal terms only, its social dimensions being ignored. This is part of the individualism which marks mainline evangelical thought and affects its social perceptions.

4.4. Revivalism and Caring for the Poor

Evangelical social concern is evidenced in the nineteenth century American revivalist tradition by a caring for the poor. Both Smith and Dayton devote chapters to this theme. Smith begins his by setting the practice of welfare to the poor in its historical setting: "... the Calvinist ethic of frugality and industry, which held individuals morally accountable for their destitution, was the prevailing tradition in America. Almsgiving was frequently regarded as an undue interference with divine justice" (1976:163).

One factor in bringing the plight of the poor to the attention of evangelicals was the temperance crusade. This according to Smith

> ...awakened Christian sensitivity to social need. It also spread the thesis that society was responsible for some poor men's sins.... Though the temperance movement stemmed from the Puritan zeal of evangelists...its aim was to reform society, not simply to regulate private behaviour (1976:167-168).

Another aspect of the ministry to the poor lay in the commencement of numerous "rescue missions". These often comprised a chapel plus other amenities providing baths and food, plus some form of accommodation and shelter. "A chief result of such activities was to marry spiritual to social service. Organizations which still specialized in soul winning now carefully defined the import of that work for the improvement of society" (Smith 1976:170-173).

It needs to be noted that while this evangelical outreach to the poor was prompted by compassion for individuals and a desire for their upliftment, another factor also appears, at least in some instances. It is the awareness, not clearly articulated as in contemporary theologies, but at least implicitly present, that God shows special love for the poor and makes their cause his own. This is borne out in the ways the needs of the poor were addressed and in the vision sometimes present of the church as the church of the poor. Dayton quotes from B.T. Roberts who in 1860 wrote in the *Earnest Christian*:

> "...the Church must follow in the footsteps of Jesus. She must see that the gospel is preached to the poor". He also came very close to arguing that obedience to this example is *the* sign of the true church. "There are hot controversies about the true church....It may be that there cannot be a church without a bishop, or that there can. There can be none without a gospel, and a gospel for the poor". Or again, "the poor are the favored ones. They are not called up. The great are called down" (1976:112).

Dayton expresses this concept as a concern which unites different movements in different periods. Speaking of evangelical action on behalf of the outcasts of society he says:

> In this work Evangelicals in part acted in obedience to and in part discovered a basic affirmation of Scripture that is only now being reemphasized by the church. If there is a consistent theme in the activist movements in the church, from liberation theology to more traditional relief, it is a declaration of a special Christian responsibility to the poor and oppressed of this world. These movements proclaim that the Scriptures have a bias in favour of the economically poor (1976:101).

4.5. Identification with the Oppressed and Resistance of Oppression

Instances of the revivalist-evangelical identification with the poor and oppressed in nineteenth century America are, in the words of Dayton, indicative of

> ...a certain Evangelical protest against the bourgeois church of the late nineteenth century. This protest drew its inspiration from Christ's mission of "preaching the gospel to the poor". Obedience to that ideal forced those who followed it not only into various forms of social service and welfare work, but also to profound identification with the class interests of the poor and a consequent radical critique of existing society (1976:119).

In considering this nineteenth century expression of a perspective rediscovered in the modern church, it is interesting to note a parallel instance of the same phenomenon, that is the feminism which emerged in revivalism and foreshadowed the modern women's rights movement. Dayton, who devotes a chapter to this theme, states that

> ...modern revivalism gave birth to the women's rights movement. A recent anthology of *The Feminist Papers* collected by Alice Rossi begins to set the record straight by tracing the roots of American feminism to the revivalism of Charles G Finney and the reform movements it spawned....Actually, it is Evangelicalism that next to Quakerism has given the greatest role to women in the life of the church (1976:86).

If this historical view is accepted, it is ironic that much of modern evangelicalism shows extreme suspicion of even mild forms of feminist theology. One reason for this may be that evangelicalism generally has fostered a way of reading the bible from the perspective of dominant groups, economically, socially, racially, and sexually. Dayton raises this issue when he points to similarities between abolitionism and feminism. Both were egalitarian in approach, but more important, both confronted the same problems of biblical interpretation.

> But the argument still turned for Evangelicals on biblical interpretation. It was abolitionists who discovered "feminist exegesis". The abolitionists faced conservatives who built a "Bible defense of slavery" on biblical instances of slavery and biblical admonitions to obedience on the part of slaves. Those who mastered Theodore Weld's "Bible argument against slavery" and learned to defend the egalitarian and liberationist "spirit" of the Bible against status quo literal interpretations, found that the same arguments could be used in support of the women's movement. Even Galatians 3:28 seemed to cojoin the issues by declaring that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (1976:89-90).

Dayton's comment is relevant because it suggests that there are contrasting perspectives from which the bible can be read which influence social understanding and action. These perspectives while themselves reflecting social conditioning are nevertheless powerful instruments in shaping the way society is seen by evangelicals. This may be said to apply whether the issue is the plight of the poor, the subjugation of women, or the social engineering of apartheid. Wherever human beings are enslaved, whatever form that enslavement may take, Christians face the question whether the bible should be read from the viewpoint of slave or slaveowner. Nineteenth century revivalism portrays the fact that Christians part company on crucial social issues because they hear the bible speak in different ways, supporting those at the bottom or those at the top, encouraging equality or reinforcing hierarchy, emphasizing human value and liberation or divinely sanctioned structures of authority and control. These hermeneutical questions have particular urgency in South Africa where conservative evangelicals, especially those who are white, often take an approach which gives support to the political establishment.

In North American evangelicalism the dawn of the twentieth century saw the absorption of all vestiges of evangelical social concern in a fundamentalism where any inclinations in this direction were thought tantamount to apostasy (Marsden 1980:124-138). When concern for social issues disappeared, so largely did concern for the

poor. As a result nineteenth century revivalist resistance to evil social structures became a lost heritage, the cause of the poor was neglected, and the bible increasingly was read from the perspectives of the rich and powerful.

5. The Rise of a Movement of Christian Conscience and Resistance

Radical evangelicalism has already been referred to as a dynamic and somewhat flexible movement. In actual fact it might be considered a complex of movements. Implicit in each is commitment to the poor, however this may be articulated, and this commitment may be seen as a common factor uniting them. This is clearly apparent when we turn from third world missiological constituencies to consider other varieties of the same thrust. An important example is the North American radical evangelical movement.

In his book, *A New Engagement: Evangelical Political Thought 1966-1976*, Robert Booth Fowler devotes a chapter to "The Radicals". The radicals he sees beginning in the late 1960s, "the creation more of Jim Wallis and the magazine he edited, *Sojourners* (earlier *The Post-American)* than of anyone else - unless it was President Johnson and the Vietnam War" (1982:115). At the heart of the movement was a refusal to "celebrate America" in the manner common to evangelicalism. The values of individualism, patriotism, and capitalism, which loomed large in the evangelical mainstream were seen by the radicals to fundamentally contradict biblical norms. This mood is captured by editor Jim Wallis in the opening words of the first edition of the *The Post-American* (Fall 1971).

> We find ourselves in the midst of a radical awakening, among people who are raising basic and critical questions about the nature of our society and about the quality of life in the world we inherit. The questioning of a new generation has generated a new awareness and activism which poses a direct challenge to the American status quo. We are characterized by our protest and our frustrated search for counter-cultural alternatives more amenable to justice, peace, human values, and spiritual meaning.

> We have become disillusioned, alienated, and angered by an American system that we regard as oppressive; a society whose values are corrupt and destructive. We have unmasked the myth of the American Dream by exposing the reality of the American Nightmare (1971:2).

This initiative sparked the commencement of other journals such as *Radix, The Other Side*, and the feminist *Daughters of Sarah*. Fowler notes how the radical movement developed its own ethos with the stress on costly discipleship, simple life-style, and particularly, community. This expressed itself in the formation of the "Sojourners Community" located in a poor, largely black area in Washington D.C.in 1975. This coincided with the changing of the name of *The Post-American* to *Sojourners*, a title which according to Wallis caught the spirit of the community better (1982:116-119).

As the third world mission theologians moved to a central emphasis on the poor through contextual and developmental involvement, so these American radicals through their discipleship and community commitments reached the same position. Fowler writes:

> Radical evangelicals regarded the plight of the poor and the conditions that resulted in their poverty as their own most serious concerns. They constituted the most urgent area for Christian witness, outranking ecological concerns and even questions of war and peace. The radicals were determined to make the sacrifices required by such a concern a litmus test of service to Christ. They felt that only those who were prepared to sacrifice for others could honestly look themselves in the mirror and call themselves followers of Christ. What better way was there to serve than by assisting the poor? (1982:124)

Fowler makes several observations about the mission to the poor as conceived within this movement. It was seen as God's unmistakable command, part of a "permanent and ongoing mandate". It involved identifying with the poor and being one with them, because "God exalts the poor and oppressed" and Jesus identified with them. John F. Alexander had no doubt that "the poor are in a sense God's people". On the reverse side, identification with the poor and recognition of their special status, involved vigorous and unremit-

ting "hostility" and opposition to those who oppressed them (1982:124).

When it came to concrete political action on behalf of the poor there was some uncertainty and division of opinion. Some saw the bible as "intensely political" and favoured working through politics to deal with poverty. Others were inhibited by the fear lest one should confuse the bible with one political ideology. In general there was refusal to work through establishment political channels which were seen as corrupted. Among some radicals a strong affinity to Anabaptist theology arose. In this tradition the impact of witnessing communities as a means of changing society was expounded. Fowler comments that radical black evangelicals did not applaud these views. "Their needs were too pressing to wait for the triumphs of alternative communities of witness" (1982:125-127).

At this point the influence of Anabaptist thinking, particularly in first world situations, needs to be underlined. This theology with its European origins, although not always directly articulate concerning the poor, has exerted a strong influence in this direction. Its discipleship emphasis and radical critique of establishment structures has had the effect of switching allegiance in some from the powerful to the powerless. Allied to this is the strong social emphasis of leading Mennonite thinkers such as John Howard Yoder in awakening mainline evangelicals to the social dimensions of the gospel. In this connection the impact of Yoder's *The Politics of Jesus* is considerable.

Another strand in a strong discipleship emphasis is seen in the issue of a simple life-style. In an earlier section the March 1980 LCWE International Consultation on Simple Life-style was mentioned. The volume arising from the Consultation11 was edited by Ron Sider who has played a leading role in awakening first world Christians to the discipleship call for simple living and the plight of the poor throughout the world. His volume *Rich Christians in an Age of*

Hunger is specially significant in this connection. Particularly within evangelical first world contexts a simple life-style emphasis has often led to deeper awareness of the need for commitment to the poor. This emphasis although not confined to radical evangelicals has been a predisposing element towards social and radical awakening.

In a recent volume edited by Jim Wallis, the development of the radical movement is updated. In *The Rise of Christian Conscience* Wallis traces the "emergence of a dramatic renewal movement in the church today". He cites numerous examples of protest and peaceful demonstrations against oppression. He sees this as a worldwide phenomenon in which Christians of different traditions combine. It is interesting to note the ecumenical character that Wallis discloses in his portrayal of this Christian resistance movement. He writes of a broad movement comprising a variety of Christians, not only radical evangelicals. What is significant however is the fact that Jim Wallis and Sojourners, with their continuing evangelical orientation, remain central movers in this drama. Of course, in its American expression, the rise of the Sojourners community is at least a major source of the whole initiative. This broadening of the movement of conscience attests the ecumenical openness of radical evangelicalism, the prime concern is not maintaining evangelical distinctives, but Christian obedience in concrete situations. In this regard there is a marked contrast with the Lausanne movement in which the element of evangelical apology still plays a considerable role (1987:xix-xxx).

Wallis distinguishes three characteristics of the movement of Christian conscience. The first is political independence, the second identification with the poor, the third spirituality. Concerning the second he writes:

> Christian conscience is especially sensitive to those who are the victims of the prevailing social order: the poor, the marginalized, the political prisoners, the oppressed race or class, women, the ethnic minority - these are the ones Christians should be particularly attentive to in any society. Christians must see the view from the out-

> side, learn the perspective from the bottom, hear the voices of the forgotten ones. Since all systems have their victims, none will respond enthusiastically to the exercise of Christian conscience on behalf of the victims (1987:xxviii-xxix).

I believe the movement of Christian conscience (centred in the USA) is vitally important in the overall radical evangelical movement for it keeps concern for the exploited alive where mainline evangelicalism too readily reflects affluent cultural Americanism. It has relevance too particularly for white South African evangelicals, for in this sector there are parallels to the American situation and in them American theological and missiological perspectives have great influence. Its relevance is that it represents an alternative form of evangelicalism to that in which perspectives reflecting success and wealth are taken as the norm. The initiatives being taken by black evangelicals (for example in the EWISA document and Concerned Evangelicals) as leaders of the radical movement in South Africa represent, I believe, a healthy alternative to more accustomed forms of evangelicalism which reflect Western capitalist values.

6. Identification with the Poor and the Biblical Norm of Justice

Richard J. Mouw has written: "The biblical call to identify with the oppressed, especially with the economically oppressed, is directly related to its mandate to promote a society characterized by justice" (1983:77-78).

6.1. In the Bible Justice spoken of Primarily as Activity on Behalf of the Disadvantaged

This is the contention of Stephen Charles Mott in his important work *Biblical Ethics and Social Change*. In his chapter on "God's Justice and Ours" he argues for a special consideration for the poor in the conception and application of justice (1982:65). He sets the scene for this chapter (as for his whole approach) in his

Preface.

> I would also like to identify an approach to the social application of the Bible which has been particularly fruitful for my own ethical understanding....in the life experience of listening in faith as the Word of God is read....the biblical message of justice creates a basic loyalty to the poor and weak, and a commitment to their defense. Scripture then is interpreted in the light of this biblically formed understanding....J. Andrew Kirk writes that the starting point of any theological interpretation must coincide "with the bias of the Christian gospel itself (`good news to the poor...release to the captives...liberty to those who are oppressed,' Luke 4.18)....There is no option; theology must be done from out of a commitment to a living God who defends the cause of `the hungry' and who sends `the rich empty away' (Luke 1.53)" (1982:viii).

Mott begins the chapter on justice by referring to the biblical words variously translated, righteousness, judgment, justice, and proposes that in contexts of social responsibility or oppression, justice is the better translation. "Since God", he says, "has a special regard for the weak and helpless, a corresponding quality is to be found in the lives of God's people (Deut. 10.18-19)". This regard has a basis in a concept of justice which is seen as similar to grace and grace's expression in love. He sees that scripture does not present love and justice as distinct and contrasting principles. "Rather there is an overlapping and a continuity". This means that the contention that justice, but not love, is the concern of the state cannot be upheld (1982:59-62). This approach contrasts with that of Carl Henry who maintains that "To attach the claims of `love' or benevolence to the interpretation of justice in the sphere of government welfare activity has led to monstrous confusion" (1964:163). For Mott, on the other hand, justice is an instrument of love.

> ...love gives birth to human rights - the fabric of justice. Justice functions to ensure that in our common life we are for our fellow human beings, which is, indeed, the meaning of love.
>
> Love raises justice above the mere equal treatment of equals; biblical justice is the equal treatment of all

> human beings solely for the reason that as human they possess bestowed worth from God....
>
> It is this assumption that all have equal merit which allows justice to be expressed by the principle of equality. Otherwise egalitarian treatment would be an expression of benevolence above and beyond what people are owed in justice. The presence of grace and love in justice universalizes the formal principle of equal treatment of equals, shows a regard for the needs of each person, and creates the obligation to seek the good of each (1982:64).

In writing of "commitment to the oppressed" Mott observes that in biblical justice there is a combination of "the affirmation of the equal worth of each person with sensitivity to the needs of each person or group", yet at the same time there is a special concern for "those who are on the fringes of the community". He contrasts biblical justice, which he calls "creative justice", with "preserving justice of the Aristotelian type". In "preserving justice" the orientation is to "sustaining people in their place in the community....if there is a disruption of the social order, justice is defined in terms of the state which previously existed". Considerations of ability, rank, or wealth, are maintained in such judgment. "Marginal people remain marginal after justice is finished".

In biblical "creative justice" however, "the individual's ability to contribute to the community is not merely preserved, but actually created".

> The difference between scriptural and classical justice lies in the understanding of what is to be the normal situation of society. The Scriptures do not allow the presupposition of a condition in which groups or individuals are denied the ability to participate fully and equally in the life of the society. For this reason, justice is primarily spoken of by the biblical writers as activity on behalf of the disadvantaged (1982:65).

In considering "the principle of redress", Mott points to the "relatively egalitarian nature of the ideal Hebrew community", This was particularly expressed in "the possession by each family in Israel of its own patrimony in the land". He refers to Alt who

speaks concerning Micah's view that "according to the ancient and holy regulation of Yahweh, the property system was to be and to remain in unconditional recognition of one man - one house - one allotment of land" (1982:65-66). By the eighth century B.C., the time of Micah, Amos and Isaiah, many of the small holdings of the peasants had been absorbed into the large estates of a new aristocracy (Isa. 5.7-8).

> Through mortgage foreclosings and oppressive sharecropping arrangements, the peasants lost their heritage from the Lord and their economic and social position. They were disappearing as an independent class, many even passing into slavery (Isa 3.14-15; Amos 8.4-6). It is in this context that the prophetic call for social justice is to be heard. The task of creative justice was to restore the poor to their position of independent economic and political power in the community (1982:66).

Mott applies this principle of creative biblical justice by contending that "identical treatment" of all is inadequate for meeting the needs of all.

> If we are to fulfill the obligation to seek for all persons security of life and well-being, some individuals will need more care than others....The equal provision of basic rights requires unequal response to unequal needs. Justice must be partial in order to be impartial. Only by giving special attention to the poor and downtrodden can one be said to be following the "principle of equal consideration of human interest" (1982:66).

This principle is something more than an attitude favouring the weak, "it implies that each member of the community will in fact be strong enough to maintain his or her position in relation to the other members (Lev.25.35-36)". Biblically, needs to be equalized include things necessary for subsistence, resources for meeting these needs like land, due process of law, independence from subjugation, and participation in legal decisions. In this application of biblical justice the principle of redress plays a dominant role. This "postulates that inequalities in the conditions necessary to achieve the standard of well-being be corrected to approximate equality" (1982:67). Redress will not be to the advantage of

everyone in the community. The interests of the wealthy who have gained riches at the expense of the poor will suffer.

> The goal of redress is to return people to a normal level of advantage and satisfaction in the community, particularly with respect to the capacity to earn a living and to have a reasonably happy life. The restoration of the land was an important element of redress in Scripture. The Year of Jubilee, recorded in Leviticus 25, is the best known of these provisions....Among its stipulations is the provision that after every fifty years all land, whether sold or foreclosed, is to be returned to the family whose heritage it is (Lev. 25.25-28). The effect of this arrangement was to institutionalize the relative equality of all persons in the landed means of production. When the number of sufferers becomes too large, private charity cannot cope with the ills of society; love then requires structural measures to achieve social justice (1982:67-68).

Mott proceeds from his consideration of redress to "Bias in favor of the oppressed". He identifies "correction of oppression" as "the first principle of justice in distribution". He continues; "In assessing the level of justice in society, the needs of the least advantaged member must first be identified; it is from that person's position that the social system is then evaluated" (1982:71).

This priority of the poor is not based on deserts but on need, "their wretchedness requires greater attention" (1982:71).

The bias in favour of the poor is qualified in the sphere of criminal justice. Here, Mott says, "the norm is the formal equality of all before the law....In this sense there is to be no partiality to the rich or to the poor" (Lev. 19.15). This principle of equality must, however, be held in tension with other factors.

> If a poor person has violated the covenant, he or she is to bear the prescribed penalty. But the dominant concern seems to be the power of substantive inequality (wealth) to corrupt the formal equality of the courts: in the instructions regarding partiality the focus is frequently on bribes (Exod. 18.21; 23.8; Deut. 16.18-19; 2 Chron. 19.7).

> The judges were not to be impartial in the sense of being neutral. They were not to be detached from the issue at hand, but active to see that the law was used for good and not for oppression. A narrow interpretation of the law was not to be used to deny the poor their rights in the land....
>
> Because biblical justice shows a bias towards the poor and because it is a socially active principle demanding responsibility on the part of the people of God, we can describe it as the taking upon oneself of the cause of those who are weak in their own defense.
>
> "I put on justice....I was a father to the poor, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know" (Job 29.14,16 RSV) (1982:71-72).

In assessing the challenge of this Old Testament ethic to Christians today, Mott says that it cannot be dismissed on the grounds of being Old Testment. The commands to justice are "so central to the ethics of the Old Testament that such dismissal would imply the rejection of *any* ethical demands of the Old Testament upon the Christian" (1982:76). This teaching on justice is based on the very nature of God which does not change with each covenant. "Jesus in his ethical teaching and practice stands in the tradition of the prophets; one will not understand Jesus or New Testament ethics except in the light of that continuity" (1982:76-77).

Mott's expositon concerning justice is, I believe, a significant contribution to a developing radical evangelical theology of the poor. It indicates that it is insufficient to talk of justice only in terms of equality without reference to the position of the poor and their need for redress. By this exposition he uncovers a biblical tradition which sees the concept of "the poor" at the heart of a theology of justice. For evangelicals, with their strong emphasis on biblical authority, this is a highly pertinent factor.

6.2. Justice for the Poor a Moral Priority

This is a perspective referred to by Samuel and Sugden: "The church should clearly take the side of the poor in society, not because the poor will always be right but because they are most likely to be taken advantage of and be unprotected against those who would exploit them" (Samuel, Sugden 1981b:46). Samuel and Sugden see this element of the protection of the poor present in various theological themes including; the kingdom of God, God at work in Christ, God at work in law and promise, and the restoration of God's image in humanity (1981b:52-66).

David Moberg writes:

> I have concluded after years of reflection on this subject that the weight of Christians usually should be thrown behind the poor, dispossessed, outcast, strangers, and minorities of society. This conclusion has resulted from two major observations.
>
> First of all, there is a great deal of attention to the poor in the Bible....
>
> A second basis for my conclusion...lies in the realities of our social structure. Those who have wealth are able to mobilize the resources of finance and personnel to sustain their power and retain their vested interests. They do not need our help...."Who speaks for the poor"? is a question that echoes throughout the world. They seldom have opportunity, and, if given it, frequently lack the ability to speak effectively for themselves (1972:134).

These comments by Samuel, Sugden, and Moberg reflect a similar emphasis to that of Mott in his reference to the biblical principle of redress. The existence of inequalities, including the vulnerability of poor people, indicates that a just society will need to give special attention to the poor and downtrodden. This has implications for the economic structuring of society. Some form of welfare, development aid, or empowerment for the economically disadvantaged is implied in the biblical norms of justice we have considered. These biblical materials strongly support the contention

that the level of justice in society is determined by the way in which its most vulnerable members are protected.

7. The Relationship between Commitment to the Poor and Economic Issues and Structures

7.1. A Link between the Poverty of the Poor and the Affluence of the Rich

Speaking of the new awareness of poverty in our contemporary situation, Samuel Escobar refers to the conviction that "poverty in one part of the world is related to affluence in the other part". He mentions some basic presuppositions which need to be evaluated. The one concerns the notion of a universal history, which is now almost universally accepted. The other presupposition relates to the concept of a "distributive justice" of God which gives much to some and little to others. This, he says, is no longer passively accepted as a kind of natural order. The awareness is growing that these inequalities have a human origin. "The concept of a divine hand behind the economic process giving much to those who worked hard and deserve the fruit of their labours, is being questioned". He refers to the fact that the modern missionary movement came out of an atmosphere where this idea of distributive justice was accepted almost without question. It was even seen that missions would help raise the level of the less fortunate nations to that of the favoured "Christian nations". "The new element in the awareness of poverty is that there is after all no desire on the part of the wealthy nations to raise the poor nations because raising the poor would endanger their wealth and undermine their power" (1978:37-39).

Jim Wallis looks at the relation between affluence and poverty within a North American context and comments:

> Blaming the poor for their poverty is one of our most venerable American traditions....While it may be an Amer-

> ican tradition to blame the victim, it clearly is not a biblical one....The Bible sees the oppression of the poor rooted in the hardness of heart of the rich and comfortable, and in the institutions and structures they set up to further their own wealth and power. Again and again in the Scriptures, the exploitation and suffering of the poor is directly attributed to the substitution of the worship of mammon for true worship of God....Throughout history, the rich have had a difficult time seeing that their prosperity is based on other people's poverty. Basil, the fourth century bishop of Caesarea, expressed his frustration on this point, saying to the rich, "How can I make you realize the misery of the poor? How can I make you understand that your wealth comes from their weeping?" We don't make the connection either. We don't understand that we have much more than we need because the poor have much less than they need (1981:43,45).

These are significant evangelical assessments which are relevant particularly in first world situations of affluence. They suggest that a comfortable middle class economic context (let alone more excessive life-styles), plus an individualistic gospel emphasis can combine to shield well meaning evangelical Christians from disturbing realities which link their privileges to the disadvantages of the poor. The emphasis of people like Escobar and Wallis is important in alerting evangelicals to aspects of faith which go beyond accustomed parameters which see things only in terms of personal relationships and are blind to social factors which victimize the poor. One obvious example in South Africa is the Group Areas Act through which black people are forced to live great distances from their places of employment whereas more affluent whites can locate themselves more conveniently to their work places.

7.2. Identification with the Poor Questions the Western Capitalist Economic Order

In the minds of many Western Christians it is taken for granted that capitalism is a Christian system, and any form of socialism anti-Christian, if not tied to atheism and bent on the overthrow of religion. These perceptions are fuelled, particularly in conservative evangelical circles, by the extremes of the anti-communist

crusade conducted by right wing religious groups. Involvement with the poor, however, often challenges this perspective and uncovers alternate approaches which question the uncritical endorsement of capitalism, and call for some form of mixed economy, or even some form of socialism. That this is happening among radical evangelicals, especially in third world contexts, is an undeniable fact.

In an essay on "Development" by Samuel and Sugden, something of the history of the capitalism-socialism debate among Christians in Western Europe and North America is traced. Referring to the industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they note that the underlying social philosophy was "the enlightened self-interest of rationalism, whose economic expression was capitalism. Its progenitor was Adam Smith, who thought he could identify self-interest as the motor for social development" (1981a:39). For some capitalism was the natural expression of the Protestant work ethic, for others it expressed the immanent work of God for social progress.

Since the nineteenth century, however, some within the Christian church have identified "the roots of capitalism in non-Christian views of man and economic life (e.g. unbridled self-interest and utilitarianism measured in terms of individual preferences)". At the beginning of the twentieth century, social gospel writers questioned the American emphasis on production which often ignored social problems. The Nonconformist movement in Britain gave birth to labour unions to give negotiating power to workers. Keir Hardie, founder of the political wing of the unions, the Labour Party, was a devout Christian. In the modern situation, the majority of western Christians follow the capitalist model (Samuel and Sugden 1981a:40-41).

> The questions of the prophetic movement at the turn of the century, however, are now being asked in a more fundamental form by Christians in the Third World, and a few radical groups in the west....They see the dichotomy of the labour practices of the multinationals between their factories in the west and their factories in the Third World. They begin to wonder whether the success of capi-

> talism in the west in combining welfare with self-interest has not been bought at the price of poverty in the Third World. They think that Gunder Frank has a prima facie case when he states that capitalism has not abolished poverty from the west, but exported it. Within the West itself a small group of Christian economists, prompted by the questions of the Third World, are reexamining the ethical basis of capitalism by Christian principles (Samuel and Sugden 1981a:41-42).

As an example of this perspective Samuel and Sugden include a long quote from Stephen Mott, which in part reads:

> Capitalism's proposal to take account of human sin by counterbalancing the self-interst of the individual with the self-interests of others is wholly inadequate, when judged by biblical principles....Equality of opportunity ... means only that the same procedures should be applied to the poor and the rich. Capitalist theory assumes that society improves by the process in which the strong gain power and the weak go to the bottom....governmental interference with natural selection will produce a sick and weakened society. Welfare...bring(s) people to a level higher than they can maintain, weakening the whole for only a temporary benefit to the naturally weak. Such a view of government is far from the biblical view of justice as taking up the cause of the weak....The biblical ideal of the ruler is not a kind uncle smiling his approval on his battling nieces and nephews as long as they do not break any rules. Rather the ideal is the ruler who "crushes the oppressor and gives deliverance to the needy" (Ps. 72:4).
>
> Mott closes with a line from Charles Dickens: "Every man for himself and God for all, shouted the elephant as he danced among the chickens" (1981a: 42).

One can see how the biblical principle of justice as activity on behalf of the disadvantaged enunciated by Mott in the previous section influences his economic perspectives in this quote.

In evangelical history there have been groups who by their emphasis and practise have questioned capitalist values. Two examples are seen among the Anabaptists and the Salvation Army.

Anabaptists were characterized by an emphasis on community which involved a rejection of individualism and had implications for eco-

nomic life. The Anabaptist vision finds expression within the group. According to Friedmann, an Anabaptist scholar:

> ...one cannot find salvation without caring for his brother....This interdependence of men gives life and salvation a new meaning. It is not "faith alone" which matters ...but it is brotherhood, this intimate caring for each other, as it was commanded to the disciples of Christ as the way to God's kingdom (Gish 1970:63-64).

This strong sense of community has led to them being seen as early socialists. They rejected selfish capitalistic motives and members were expected to share what they possessed. Spittelmaier's "Seven Decrees of Scripture" illustrates this view of economics:

> A real Christian should not even have enough property on earth to be able to stand on it with one foot. This does not mean that he should go and lie down in the woods and not have a trade or that he should not work, but only that he might not think they are for his own use, and be tempted to say: This house is mine, this field is mine, this money is mine, but rather ours, even as we pray: Our Father. In brief, a Christian should not have anything of his own, but should have all things in common with his brother, not allow him to suffer need (Gish 1970:66).

Gish notes that there was no agreement on how this ideal should be lived out. For the Hutterites it took a structured form with no private property and community of goods. For most other groups it was voluntaristic with a clear teaching on sharing with those in need. There was, however, agreement that Christians should not consider their property as their own, and that the needs of others should be responded to as if they were one's own personal needs (1970:66).

It is not surprising that this contradiction of the norms of the hierarchical society of the time made the Anabaptists objects of opposition and abuse. This finds classic expression in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession: "Wherefore we detest the Anabaptists and other seditious folk, and in general all those who reject the higher powers and magistrates and would subvert justice, introduce community of goods and confound that decency and good order which God has established among men" (Verduin 1964:221).

We have noted earlier the role of the Salvation Army in a ministry to the poor. Dayton places this within an American context and refers to its commitment to the cause of the poor in society and even to evidences of socialist emphases among some early leaders. Their close contact with the poor moved them to a radical critique of American society.

> The Booths' son Ballington argued that "we must have justice - more justice ...to right the social wrong by charity is like bailing the ocean with a thimble....We must adjust our social machinery so that the producers of wealth become the owners of wealth". In a biography of Catherine Booth, W T Stead called her a "Socialist, and something more" because she was "in complete revolt against the existing order". And the army's primary organ the *War Cry* asserted that the chief social evil in America was the "unequal and unjust distribution of wealth" (1976:118).

In any consideration of this theme in our modern world, it is imperative that the third world situation and the perspectives of Christians from this context play a decisive role. Thus the words of evangelical missiologist Orlando Costas have particular significance.

> ...we ought to defend the rights of the poor to enjoy the basic amenities of life by championing more communal structures of social organization, such as an economy that offers genuine possibilties of socialized production and consumption, and a political structure that allows greater participation and guarantees personal rights and public safety. In my opinion this can only be achieved in a socialistically organized society, though admittedly, there are several models of socialism, none of which could be applied to any one situation without some kind of modification (1982:95).

A quote like this is interesting because, coming from a third world evangelical source, it does not sound so strange or surprising. For an evangelical from the Western world to speak in these terms however would raise many more eyebrows. This indicates the degree to which evangelicals of the West are influenced by contexts where capitalism is seen as the only Christian option for an economy. It

is clear that a radical evangelical theology of the poor creates greater openness for challenging this kind of capitalist monopoly in the search for economic structures that will do justice to the poor.

8. Identification with the Poor, and Developing Theologies of Holistic Evangelism

The rise and development of a movement of holistic evangelism following Lausanne 1974 has already been noted. In this movement, whose centre of gravity is in the third world, and which I have labelled radical evangelical, an emphasis on holistic evangelism is the most prominent feature. It seems, however, that almost without exception, wherever holistic emphases emerge these lead in some form or other to an emphasis on the poor. On the other hand, where these impulses are denied and a dualistic concept of mission prevails, the poor are kept out of sight, except maybe as objects of benevolence unconnected to the central mission of the church.

8.1. Commitment to the Poor as a Primary Factor in the Theology of Holistic Evangelism

Exposure to the materials representative of this movement lead to the conclusion that a theology of holistic evangelism is closely tied to commitment to the poor. The following are some examples of the link between holistic evangelism and an emphasis on the poor.

Orlando Costas is a leading exponent of evangelical holistic missiology. In the Foreword to his book *The Integrity of Mission*, Ronald Sider has identified three theological themes that "are central to Costas's plea for a biblically holistic approach". They are: that "evangelistic proclamation today must return to Jesus' announcement of the Good News of the Kingdom". Also crucial is that the church is "the new messianic community, already incarnat-

ing the values of Jesus' kingdom". The third theme is "the scriptural emphasis on God's special concern for the poor" (1979:x).

That this perspective is basic in Costas's view of mission is further illustrated in the introduction to his doctoral thesis *Theology of the Crossroads in Contemporary Latin America : Missiology in Mainline Protestantism 1969-1974.* He lists 23 propositions at the commencement of the dissertation. I quote two of these which relate to our present purpose.

> 2. The gospel is particularly addressed to the poor, their struggle is a fundamental concern of God's mission and thus profoundly affects the identity of the church.
>
> 4. One of the tasks of contemporary missiology is to help liberate the church from its imprisonment to a one-sided, often manipulative evangelism and set it on the course of a holistic evangelism wherein the gospel is shared *in depth* and *out of the depth* of the needs and life situations of men and women everywhere (1976:I).

Waldron Scott has related holistic mission and the poor to the "Great Commission", saying: "If the Great Commission has to do with making disciples rather than merely registering "decisions" for Christ, and if commitment to Jesus means commitment to the Kingdom of God,...then it follows that Great Commission disciple making requires commitment to the poor, the weak and the oppressed" (1980:26).

David Bosch, in an article on "Church Growth Missiology" has identified the particular thrust holistic mission should have in South Africa. "Is not the first priority in the White South African Church - all denominations - to show solidarity with the weak, the marginalised, and the oppressed? And would not such a stance in any event be essentially evangelistic, leading to church growth at another moment in history" (1988:19)?

8.2. A Theology of the Poor Challenges Western Evangelical Individualism

In writing concerning Samuel's concept of dignity, Sugden reflects on the way in which his emphasis on identity being found in the family of God expresses the importance of community. Samuel argues that the New Testament emphasis is on Christians as the children of God, not just as the aggregate of individual children of God, that is, as those whose individual identity arises from their belonging to God's family. "He argues that the gospel is addressed to groups and communities first, and within that the individual is addressed" (Sugden 1988:280). Sugden refers to the way this insight of Samuel's is affirmed by Christopher Wright:

> Westerners like myself have to undergo a certain reorientation in our habitual pattern of ethical thought in this matter if we are to see things from a biblical perspective. We tend to begin at the personal level and work outwards...However, the Bible tends to place the emphasis the other way round: Here is the kind of society that God wants...what kind of person must you be to be worthy of your inclusion within it, and what must be your contribution to the furthering of these overall social objectives (1988:280-281)?

In Samuel's thought the new identity given the poor is not the attainment of "a new individual self-image...in a spiritual sphere divorced from other relationships or received on one's own apart from the world" (Sugden 1988:281). He is concerned about such individualism which has the effect of divorcing the person from his or her environment. He writes:

> Many Christians speak of receiving eternal life as though it was a gift of transcendental bliss or inward peace, which comes to people to be received in totality in complete isolation from their context....(The Biblical) call to discipleship was a call to follow Jesus and join a community who took a stance in a context (1988:281).

Samuel sees this issue of the individual and the community to have profound implications for a theology of the poor.

> We have failed to appreciate this perspective (of the gospel to the poor) because we have narrowed the focus of

> the formulation of the gospel and the context of the faith to individuals. The question then emerges why one individual should matter more than another. However with the biblical focus on the community and on relationships between groups within the community we can see how Jesus' focus on the poor is the call to the marginalized group to become his community. The good news is thus introduced to the whole community through the poor (1988:448).

Individualism is closely allied to dualism. The particular form these two philosophies take among conservative evangelicals has the same effect, a kind of faith in which context is ignored. Individualism brings a divorce between the person and the life situation or the community. Dualism brings a divorce in the person's world view, between the spiritual and the material. These combine in mainline evangelical thought and action to produce an approach in which there is an almost exclusive focus on the spiritual needs of the individual. This produces the otherworldly privatized form of faith which Costas has called "a gospel without demands".

> The content of this gospel is a conscience-soothing Jesus, with an unscandalous cross, an otherworldly kingdom, a private, inwardly limited spirit, a pocket God, a spiritualized Bible, and an escapist church. Its goal is a happy, comfortable, and successful life, obtainable through the forgiveness of an abstract sinfulness by faith in an unhistorical Christ. Such a gospel makes possible the "conversion" of men and women without having to make any drastic changes in their lifestyles and value-systems. It guarantees, moreover, the preservation of the status quo and the immobility of the People of God (1982:79-80).

It goes without saying that within such privatized faith the concerns of the poor receive little attention.

8.3. Identification with the Poor develops in the Context of an Integral view of Salvation

It is Costas particularly who expounds this concept. In his *Christ Outside the Gate* his second chapter is devoted to "Sin and Salvation in an Oppressed Continent". In this he speaks of "Salvation

as Justification and Liberation". For Paul "the good news includes the revelation of God's justice (Rom.1:17)" which like justification and forgiveness is part of God's gracious action. Though the action of God in "justice and liberation can only be confirmed eschatologically,....(the definitive consummation of the kingdom of God)", this does not preclude our expectations for the present.

> We do not have to wait for the consummation of the kingdom in order to discern its justice in the social and political sphere and the presence of its liberating power in social structures. The Holy Spirit is showing us already signs of social and political justice and structural liberation in many places and situations. We know that an event is a sign of the justice of God when it enables the poor and oppressed to experience a measure of economic, sociocultural, and political liberation (1982:29-30).

He speaks of salvation as God's work of grace which is announced in the gospel of Christ. This brings a new relationship between God and humankind. It "places women and men in a new situation in the world". This has a threefold effect:

> First it makes them faithful pilgrims of the kingdom of God, disciples absolutely and unconditionally committed to Christ's mission in history. Second, it places them in the service of justice and the integral liberation of all creation. Third, it prepares them to live in communion with the Father, by the grace of the Son and the power of the Holy Spirit - a communion that is substantiated in the fellowship of the church and in its efforts to achieve the reconciliation of a divided world... (1982:32-33).

In this integral view of salvation as both justification and liberation he speaks contextually as a member of the Latin American community. In considering "Sin and Salvation in Latin America" he conceives the continent to be one "Born in Sin, but Saturated with the Message of Salvation". This irony is epitomized in the "Europeans (who) arrived with the cross as well as the sword. They enslaved the indigenous and African population while announcing the message of salvation" (1982: 33-35). He asks, "How does one proclaim the gospel in a continent...where the cross has traditionally accompanied the sword and where people call themselves

Christians but live in idolatry"? To overcome such contradiction demands a gospel which speaks to the whole situation and involves alignment with the oppressed.

> The good news cannot be announced with credibility without denouncing the surrounding sinful situation,...Evangelization demands, above all things, authenticity....This implies it is impossible to bring good news of salvation in a poor and oppressed continent if one is allied to structures that disregard life and perpetuate injustice. To do so would be to perpetuate the contradiction between the sword and the cross (1982:36-37).

8.4. Relationship between Evangelical Holistic Theology and Theologies of Liberation

Theologies such as the one formulated by Costas naturally raise questions about the ways in which holistic evangelicals relate to liberation theology. Costas critiques liberation theologies from a sympathetic and appreciative perspective. He sees three problem areas. The first relates to the question of the primacy given to political dimensions of faith. The second concerns a too optimistic view of human nature coupled with a "synergistic concept of saving grace" resulting in this grace being made "extensive to everyone in Jesus Christ". The third concerns the role of the Bible in which it is treated as *only* a reference point. "The praxeological problem with liberation theology is ...that it has given Marxian thought a privileged place in its theory of praxis while denying a similar place to the Bible" (1982:128-131).

Costas also sees three challenges in liberation theology. It challenges those "who insist on the priority and normativeness of Scripture in theology and do not make a similar insistence on personal and social transformation as part of the proclamation and teaching of the Word". Second, it is a protest against the sterility of academic theology, and third it "challenges the institutional church by unmasking its ethical impotence in an unjust world" (1982:131).

At the conclusion of his summary of the basic characteristics of liberation theology he describes it as "an attempt to articulate the faith from the perspectives of the nonpersons of society. Whatever our judgment of this theological discourse, one thing is indisputable: its commitment to the oppressed and its articulation of their deepest concerns" (1982:128). In this, radical evangelicals certainly are at one with liberationists. In the words of Howard Snyder: "Admittedly liberation theology has its problems. The major problem is not its focus on the poor and oppressed, for that is largely biblical" (1983:21). These and similar perspectives relating to the way evangelicals relate to theologies of liberation will be explored later in this thesis.

8.5. Commitment to the Poor seen in the Light of the Kingdom of God and Conversion

At the heart of the new movement of holistic evangelism lies an awakening to the significance of the kingdom of God as part of the essence of the gospel proclamation. In this setting conversion is conceived to be not only to God in terms of personal repentance, but also to the new order inaugurated in Christ in which there is commitment to our neighbours, particularly those who are poor and oppressed. Costas has written:

> Salvation comes by way of conversion from sin and self to God and neighbor. Negatively, this implies a disposition to change one's egoistic values, to renounce any pretension of self-sufficiency and to break with any form of oppression. Positively, it means commitment to God's kingdom and its righteousness, total dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ and entrance into a life of liberating service to all human beings in general and to the sociologically oppressed in particular (1979:82).

In his book *The Call to Conversion* Jim Wallis says that "understanding conversion is really the central issue for today's churches. Conversion understood apart from or outside history must be reappropriated and understood in direct relationship to that his-

tory" (1981:xvi). He further sees conversion as "the beginning of active solidarity with the purposes of the kingdom of God in the world" (1981:9). He describes the shape this kingdom solidarity takes in God's new order revealed in the gospel.

> Here love was given daily expression; reconciliation was actually occurring. People were no longer divided into Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. In this community the weak were protected, the stranger welcomed. People were healed, and the poor and dispossessed were cared for and found justice (1981:15).

In the context of these perceptions the idea of conversion has social and political as well as personal and spiritual overtones. It involves commitments to a way of living in which God's kingdom values are paramount and consequently in which commitment to the poor becomes a central feature. Such perceptions have profound implications for evangelism and mission and stand in challenging contradiction to traditional individualistic and dualistic evangelical interpretations of the gospel.

9. Concluding Observations

A number of extremely significant issues which call for attention have been raised in this survey. In a future chapter I will endeavour to work through some of the implications of these and other issues relating to a radical evangelical theology of the poor. At this point, however, we need to gather together some of the salient features of the survey just undertaken.

(1) In this survey there is clear evidence to support the contention that commitment to the poor is a primary characteristic of radical evangelicalism. This commitment appears both as a central factor in the mission practice and philosophy of the radical community and as a key category in its theology and social analysis.

(2) The sources surveyed point to a number of key figures whose thinking is significant for a radical evangelical theology of the

poor including the following: Vinay Samuel, Chris Sugden, Orlando Costas, Jim Wallis, Stephen Mott, Rene Padilla, Samuel Escobar, Ron Sider, Donald Dayton and Andrew Kirk. The written contributions from these sources form a main pool of materials for the theology being developed in this thesis.

(3) Historical developments traced in the survey indicate the emergence of a separate radical community within evangelicalism with various sources and networks. Major expression of this are The International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians, the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies and the journal *Transformation.*

(4) The radical "movement" surveyed represents mainly third world perspectives. Although some of the leading figures mentioned are of North American and British origin in the main they identify with a third world approach and in some cases (Sugden and Kirk) have worked for extended periods within third world situations. In addition the contribution of other third world figures not mentioned in the survey is important. Among these are: Kwame Bediako (Ghana), Michael Nazir-Ali (Pakistan), David Lim (Philippines), David Gitari (Kenya), Thomas Hanks (Costa Rica), and Rolando Gutierrez-Cortes (Mexico).

(5) The developing theology of the poor touches a broad spectrum of issues. Among these are: the understanding of the gospel; the interpretation of scripture; the way in which God, Christ, humanity, and salvation are understood; the interpretation of evangelical history; the way in which human society is viewed; the understanding of justice; views of economics; interpretations of mission and evangelism; and the way in which the kingdom of God is understood.

(6) It is clear that the commitment to the poor reflected in this survey involves a form of evangelical theology which takes a significantly different shape from evangelical theology as it is traditionally conceived. Thus a radical evangelical theology of the poor involves an alternative formulation of evangelical theology

which challenges some of the common models of Western conservative thought. This reformulation and challenge are part of the central purpose of this thesis.

NOTES

1 Examples of these are, the reading of the bible from the perspectives of the poor, the concept that God sides with the poor and oppressed, and the issue of the holistic mission of the church.

2 Principal of EBSemSA (The Evangelical Bible Seminary of Southern Africa), Pietermaritzburg.

3 The spelling "wholistic" is preferred to "holistic" by many radical evangelicals. In this thesis I will adhere to "holistic" however, as this appears to be the more common South African practice.

4 Padilla, "Evangelism and the World", and Escobar, "Evangelism and Man's Search for Freedom, Justice, and Fulfillment". These papers are recorded in *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, Official Reference Volume of the Lausanne Congress edited by J.D. Douglas, pp.116 and 303 respectively.

5 The "Statement of the Stuttgart Consultation of Evangelism" is dated 27 March 1987. There were 45 participants in the Consultation which met at the invitation of the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches and the Introduction refers to "the many who are evangelicals here" (Samuel and Hauser 1989:213-228). The Stuttgart Statement clearly lies within the evangelical tradition and reflects the thinking of what Vinay Samuel has called a "Movement for Integral Evangelism" (1989:10). An advert for the volume edited by Samuel and Hauser, *Proclaiming Christ in Christ's Way: Studies in Integral Evangelism*, speaks of the Stuttgart Statement as "produced by evangelicals" (Transformation October/Decmeber 1989:26). In my view it clearly reflects radical evangelical thinking in contrast to the Manila Manifesto which reflects LCWE thinking.

6 This exposition is contained in Sugden's unpublished Ph.D. Thesis submitted to Westminster College, Oxford in February 1988. It is entitled: "A critical and comparative study of the practice and theology of Christian social witness in Indonesia and India between 1974 and 1983 with special reference to the work of Wayan Mastra in the Protestant Christian Church of Bali and of Vinay Samuel in the Church of South India." Pages 1-223 deal with Mastra, 224-365 with Samuel, 366-450 compare and contrast them, and 451-481 compare and contrast their theology and missiology with western evangelical theology and missiology. All references to Samuel in this chapter are taken from this source, unless otherwise specified.

7 Sugden asserts that the originality of the research in his thesis on Samuel arises from his collaboration with him as a ministerial colleague in Bangalore, India, between April 1978 and August 1983. This collaboration extended to joint writing projects which continued beyond 1983 and which form the major portion of Samuel's written work. Referring to their joint literary output Sugden says: "All the papers produced were the product of taping conversations, drafting a paper from the transcripts, discussing and finalising the paper together. Since August 1983 the writer has been based in Oxford and continued to work with Vinay Samuel on lecturing, writing and publishing in Asia, Latin America and Africa" (1988:225). The extent of this writing partnership is reflected in Sugden's thesis bibliography which lists nine published and two unpublished works by Samuel (mostly journal articles). In contrast there are twenty nine published and four unpublished writings (mostly articles in journals or published compilations) co-authored with Sugden (1988:492-496). (This number of publications includes a series of sixteen articles in *Third Way* magazine). These figures represent a clear preponderance of writing in collaboration with Chris Sugden. It is certainly impossible to think of the literary contribution of Samuel without linking it to that of Sugden. Therefore, although this thesis makes little reference to the lesser known works of which Samuel is sole author (with the exception of his major work *The Meaning and Cost of Discipleship)*, its use of Sugden as interpreter of Samuel's thought in his thesis and reference to their more well known joint writings are sufficient to accurately represent Samuel's thinking.

8 "Samuel's mission practice concentrates on initiating, enabling and overseeing the following ministries: educating underprivileged children, giving shelter and protection to young girls from destitute families liable to be sold into prostitution, arranging employment for poor women, providing loan schemes and business opportunities for the unemployed, building sheltered housing for vulnerable elderly people, coordinating training for young Christian people for mission among the poor, officiating as secretary of a national relief agency, and giving educational opportunities to Christian lay persons in theological education. His theological reflection develops a view of the relation of the Christian gospel to poor people" (Sugden 1988:228-229). In 1983 Samuel became pastor of a daughter congregation of St John's Church, Bangalore, a large middle class church, where he had been pastor from 1975-1983. This daughter congregation is located in Lingarajapurum, a slum area outside the city boundary, to which the Samuels and their four children moved to live in 1983 (1988:237).

9 See Stephen Mott *Jesus and Social Ethics*, "The term sinner (harmatolos) was not a moral description but a technical term. It was a title used to refer to a group of people who could be both identified and segregated. In the Gospels the 'sinners' are the tax collectors, prostitutes and drunkards" (1984:12).

10 There are two works which are specially relevant to our present focus. They are *Discovering an Evangelical Heritage* by Dayton, and

Revivalism and Social Reform by Smith (published originally in 1957 but reissued since then with an addition).

11 *Lifestyle in the Eighties: An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle.*

CHAPTER FOUR

A THEOLOGY OF THE POOR

In the preceding chapters we have reflected on radical evangelicalism and the poor. We have noted that the poor are those who are deprived and oppressed. We have looked at both the South African context and the bible and in them seen this twofold character reflected. We have also surveyed the radical evangelical constituency and noted how in it the poor are a central concern for mission and theology. The point has now been reached where these various considerations concerning the poor need to be gathered and drafted into a theological statement. The question needs to be faced; what kind of theological formulation do these reflections on the poor demand?

In the previous chapter I presented a survey of the perspectives of leading exponents of radical evangelicalism. This material, together with earlier comments concerning the identity of the poor, is summarized in the following initial theological statement.

A radical evangelical theology of the poor is a theology in which the poor feature as a key category for reflection. This perception reflects a commitment to the poor grounded in the conviction that in the bible God is seen as standing on the side of those who are oppressed. In this theology the gospel is understood through its original connection to the poor and is seen to be best understood by those who suffer oppression. In evangelicalism a commitment to the poor is part of a lost heritage whose recovery is being headed by those from contexts of oppression whose experience has led them to reject traditional formulations which spiritualize biblical concepts of poverty. In this developing tradition identifying with the poor is seen as more than welfare or development, it also involves resistance to oppression and action to combat structural

evil, which are seen as major causes of poverty. Such action by the poor and on behalf of the poor is an expression of the pursuit of social justice and is seen to have economic implications. These implications are expressed personally by the non-poor in the adoption of a simple life-style and also socially (especially by some in third world contexts) in the questioning of those forms of capitalism which exploit the poor. Foundational to this evangelical theology of the poor is a developing view of integral evangelism in which the gospel is seen to apply to the whole person and the whole of society.

In surveying the development of the radical evangelical movement it appears that an option for the poor has not been a starting point in theological formulation, rather it has been a conclusion to which such evangelicals have consistently been drawn, sometimes referred to as a "discovery" which has been made. This discovery with its awakening to the significance of the poor for mission and theology constitutes a challenge to the radical evangelical community to develop alternative theological formulations which will counteract oppressive elements in the evangelical tradition which deny the original meaning of the gospel as "good news for the poor". It is my purpose in this chapter to attempt such a formulation. As stated in a previous chapter, the theology being developed in this thesis, while attempting to remain in harmony with the main outlines of radical evangelical thought, is a formulation for which I alone am responsible. Ultimately this project reflects my effort to fashion a theology of the poor which will provide an alternative to aspects of the dominant tradition and which will serve as a resource in the radical evangelical community with which I identify.

This is an enterprise which has particular relevance in the South African context where conservative evangelicalism has often appeared to support or at least be complacent about a socio-political system characterized by ruthless oppression of the poor. The present changing political climate1 lends urgency to this theological

challenge for it calls for a new understanding of the relevance of the gospel as "good news for the poor" and an awakening in the evangelical community to this perspective. In this context radical evangelicals, comprising mainly black Christians and reflecting mainly black perspectives and interests, have a responsibility to be agents of liberation to mainline evangelicals whose world view mainly reflects a white Western influence. I believe that such radicals, equipped with a theology focussed on the poor, can play a significant role in leading other evangelicals towards a more holistic understanding of their faith and thereby help them to come to terms with the newly developing South African situation with all the uncertainties and pitfalls which lie on the long road ahead.

The term "theology" is used here in its classical sense of "faith seeking understanding" (Nolan, Broderick 1987:10). It refers to the endeavour of believing people to formulate their faith in ways that are true to its foundation in God's self-revelation and relevant to the contexts in which it exists. In referring to the literal meaning of "theology" as "rational discourse about God", Orlando Costas has described it as "that reflection which seeks to understand the content of faith and its implications for life" (1989:2). In Christian theology reflection on faith is governed supremely by God's revelation in Jesus Christ. "For Christians, the clearest, most concrete and definitive expression of God's Word is Jesus of Nazareth in his life and work" (Costas 1989:3). Duane Friesen in speaking of theology as a way of looking at issues from a particular perspective says: "A Christian theology is one that looks at the world and what is happening to it by taking as ultimately decisive for life the reality of Jesus Christ" (1986:49). In the theological formulation in this chapter, as throughout this thesis, this Christological perspective is adhered to together with the affirmation that all theological discourse arises from and reflects the context in which it is made. Albert Nolan contends that all theology is contextual and I agree with his statement that: "While Christian faith remains the same at all times and in all circumstances, the theological attempt to answer

questions about this faith will vary according to the different historical and social contexts that gave rise to the questions" (1987:11).

There are three misconceptions concerning theology which I believe exert a negative influence in the evangelical community. The first is that theology is too often thought of as an "absolute" statement of truth. The tendency exists to confuse faith with its expression and claim for theology itself an authoritative or final character. In response to this, theology's nature as a human fallible enterprise needs to be emphasized. The second misconception relates to the field of theology. Too often this is seen too narrowly as relating only to themes directly concerning God and the church and excluding broader social issues. It is my contention that the consideration of any issue in the light of Christian faith may properly be called theology. It is not the field of attention which determines theology but the relationship of this to God's revelation in Christ. In the strictest and narrowest sense only the doctrine of God qualifies as true theology, but the term more often has a broader connotation. I opt for a broader use of the term.2 The third unhelpful misconception is that theology is an elitist activity. While it is neither possible nor desirable to exclude specialization from the theological enterprise it is, I believe, harmful to restrict it to this, for theology properly belongs within the ordinary Christian community as an essential part of its self understanding. In this regard a theology of the poor is relevant for it implies not only that the poor are objects of theological reflection, but they themselves become subjects of this reflection and their community a source of theological formulation. In a statement by Concerned Evangelicals of Natal made in April 1988 the following is one of the aims expressed: "To affirm the fact that theology should not only be accessible to powerless people who bear the brunt of the socio-political situation in South Africa but it should also be done by them".

A theology of the poor is, I believe, one of the key issues for evangelical attention at this time in history. David Wright has

spoken of two issues which are moving to centre stage for evangelical attention; the poor and pluralistic concerns. He asks:

> How should Evangelicals respond creatively to the gospel and its implications in order to meet the needs of today's world?...The story of theological development - of creeds, articles and confessions, of *Institutes of Christian Religion, Systematic Theologies and Church Dogmatics* - reveals the articulation of church doctrine largely in response to heresy and church schism (church disturbances) on the one hand and through interaction with philosophy, history and science (intellectual pressures) on the other hand. It is arguable that for the forseeable future theology will have to be done at the interface with two fronts which come to the fore only with the twentieth century. These are presented by the vitality and resurgence of other faiths or religions and the needs of an unequal world. The former of these challenges is taxing enough, although Christian history can throw up some precedents to guide the modern theologian. (I think especially of Christianity's encounter with the distinguished tradition of Greek wisdom in the early centuries). But never before have the claimant needs of millions of undernourished, underprivileged, oppressed people constituted a creative factor in the explication of the church's theology (1978:13).

It is this "creative factor" in theology which we will focus on in this chapter as we consider a number of themes which concern the poor in relation to God's self-revelation and various ways in which these have been understood.

1. Simple Lifestyle

This is a natural starting point for an evangelical theology of the poor because a discipleship emphasis, including simple living, has been the road along which many evangelicals (particularly those from more affluent contexts) have moved to a commitment to the poor. Within an evangelical context this is an issue of some importance for it forms a background for theologizing concerning the poor.

Reference has been made earlier to the LCWE International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle held in March 1980. At this Consultation a statement called "The Commitment" was made. This in part reads:

> Our Christian obedience demands a simple lifestyle, irrespective of the needs of others. Nevertheless the facts that 800 million people are destitute and that about 10,000 die of starvation every day make any other lifestyle indefensible.
>
> While some of us have been called to live among the poor, and others to open our homes to the needy, all of us are determined to develop a simpler lifestyle. We intend to reexamine our income and expenditure, in order to manage on less and give away more. We lay down no rules or regulations, for either ourselves or others. Yet we resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings (Sider 1982:16).

Accompanying the development of a simple lifestyle awareness in evangelicalism was a parallel awakening to the radical elements in the teaching of Jesus in the synoptic gospels concerning wealth. This perspective became more pronounced in the radical evangelical community particularly in leaders such as Ron Sider and Jim Wallis who challenged traditional evangelical interpretations which watered down radical elements in biblical stories concerning renunciation of possessions. An example of this is the way in which a well known biblical story, that of the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-31), had commonly been treated by evangelicals. The standard interpretation of the story with its call by Jesus to this young man to "sell everything you have and give to the poor" (Mark 10:21) has been that followers of Jesus must be prepared to surrender whatever idols may stand in the way of their discipleship. As Sider points out, this interpretation often ignores the contextual relevance of the passage which speaks to the idolatrous consumerism of Western society. Concerning the "idolatry" interpretation he writes that it is both "unquestionably true and unquestionably inadequate. To say no more is to miss the fact that wealth and possessions are the most common idols of us rich Westerners....The standard of living is the god of the twentieth-century Westerner, and the ad man is its prophet" (1977:151).

From this greater openness to the radicality and contextual relevance of the gospel records there developed within radical

evangelicalism (particularly in its first world expression) a prophetic resistance to consumerism. Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* is the most obvious example of this. He writes:

> We have been brainwashed to believe that bigger houses, more prosperous business and more luxurious gadgets are worthy goals in life. As a result we are caught in an absurd materialistic spiral. The more we make, the more we think we need in order to live decently and respectably. Somehow we have to break this cycle because it makes us sin against our needy brothers and sisters and, therefore, against our Lord (1977:152).

A theology of the poor, though far more than just a perspective on simple living, must consistently involve this dimension if it is to have credibility, especially for Christians in positions of economic advantage. This factor must also however be seen contextually, for the call to simple living does not have equal relevance in all situations. Within an affluent white suburb in a South African city its relevance is unquestioned, whereas within the impoverished context of a black township this emphasis is most inappropriate. Therefore we may say that in an evangelical theology of the poor the element of simple lifestyle has had undoubted value in preparing the way for further reflection, it is extremely pertinent in first world contexts, but it has limited relevance for third world Christians for whom simple lifestyle is not a matter of choice.

2. Traditional Evangelicalism and the Poor

In the "Survey" chapter I noted the "growing awareness of the poor in recent evangelical thinking". While this has significance it is limited by constraints within its theology and social analysis. Despite some advances in the general evangelical community the overall situation is somewhat ambivalent, and in its more conservative expressions unfavourable towards the poor.

2.1. Attitudes toward the Poor in the Evangelical Community

I suggest that the following three attitudes express leading evangelical perspectives concerning the poor.

2.1.1. Apathy and Opposition

This attitude is seen mainly in the extreme right wing of evangelicalism, the fundamentalist movement. This movement is an embarrassment to many mainline evangelicals who prefer to distance themselves from it. In recent times the growth of right wing Christianity, notably in South Africa, has become a significant factor in the life of the church. For those evangelicals committed to the poor this is a disturbing phenomenon because within this movement there is not only apathy to the real needs of the poor, but also virulent opposition to those who espouse their cause and explicit support for social structures which oppress them.

One of the leading examples of right wing religion in South Africa is the Gospel Defence League. In an article on this organization Roger Arendse has referred to its fanatical anti-communism and the corresponding way in which it unconditionally blesses capitalism ("sacralised capitalism"). This he says involves a misinterpretation of the root causes of poverty which are seen as "idolatry, ancestor `reverence', slothfulness, covetousness and general disobedience to God's law". The outcome of this approach is "further domination of the rich and powerful over the poor and powerless" (1989:101).

An extreme example of right wing polemic and opposition to the struggle on behalf of the poor is seen in the volume *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* by David Chilton. This volume, which abounds in rhetorical excess, is an attack on Ron Sider and his work *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. It claims to expound God's law and among other things maintains that slavery

was a biblical institution which had "as its basic purpose the elimination of poverty" (1981:59). It is interesting to note that this volume, whose major thrust is to defend the rights of the rich and powerful, is advertised and recommended in the South African right wing journal *Signposts*.

2.1.2. General Unawareness and Insensitivity

While right wing fundamentalism explicitly supports oppressive socio-political systems, the middle ground representing the general constituency of conservative evangelicalism, takes an approach which, while claiming neutrality, has the same effect. I would say that this constituency, particularly in its white South African expression, lives mainly in unawareness of the plight of the poor and is influenced by a social outlook which makes it incapable of identifying with it.

An example of this inability to understand the perspective of the oppressed community is seen in an incident which happened at the Assembly of the Baptist Union of Southern Africa in Kimberley in October 1989. At this gathering the venue was changed from a South African Defence Force (SADF) base to the Kimberley Baptist Church following a statement and protest walkout by eight delegates. A report on this happening by leader of the protest, Desmond Hoffmeister, reveals an appalling lack of sensitivity by denominational leadership and membership (predominantly white) to the experience of the oppressed community. In Hoffmeister's report there is a repetition of a constant theme. In tracing something of the experience of the so-called "Coloured" Baptist community with the Baptist Union he repeats the expression, "listen to us, listen to us". Obviously down the years the experience of the oppressed community has been one of not being heard. Hoffmeister notes that a resolution from the Assembly floor proposing: "This Assembly expresses sympathy for those who find it difficult to preach the gospel in their situation as a result of their association with the

SADF" (approximate wording) was overwhelmingly rejected (1989:10). This epitomizes the unawareness and insensitivity of white conservative evangelicalism and its constant inclination to side with those "at the top" rather than those "at the bottom".

Radical evangelicals in response to such attitudes speak prophetically about the mainline's implicit and instinctive support of status quo oppression. Jim Wallis in decribing the way this works in the USA has written:

> As the country became rich and fat, so did its evangelicals, who soon replaced the good news of Christ's kingdom with a personal piety that comfortably supported the status quo. Evangelicals in our day are not known as friends of the poor. Rather evangelicals are known to have a decided preference for the successful and prosperous who see their wealth as a sign of God's favor. Ironically, a movement that once fought to free slaves, support industrial workers, and liberate women now has a reputation for accommodating racism, favoring business over labor, and resisting equal rights for women (1981:56).

2.1.3. Special Individual Concern

We turn our attention now to a group of evangelicals whom I have chosen to call "progressive traditionalists". In my view they exemplify Western individualistic thought patterns which retain much of the traditional baggage of conservative evangelicalism, yet nevertheless they have broken out of the privatized faith and social apathy of the middle ground. The influence of these progressives is seen in the LCWE movement and expressed in the attention given to the poor in documents like the Manila Manifesto. John Stott is an example of this approach as is Michael Cassidy in a South African context.

I see at least four significant elements in Stott's theology of the poor. First, there is a genuine concern for the poor and a readiness to speak out against oppression. Second, he attempts a kind

of synthesis between material and spiritual poverty seeing Christ's "good news to the poor" as referring "to both in combination" (1984:220). What is clear however is that his whole theological orientation causes the spiritual element to invariably come out on top in the attempted "combination", thus reinforcing the common evangelical inclination to spiritualize biblical references to poverty. His consistent support of the Lausanne affirmation of the primacy of evangelism in the church's mission has the effect of making material aspects junior partners in the "combination", from which it is only a short step to the total neglect of such aspects of poverty altogether. Third, he expresses discomfort with the expression "bias for the poor", preferring "preferential option". He then however, redefines this to mean "mission priority" (1984:221). It seems to me that what he is doing is trying to preserve an option for the poor as objects to be addressed in mission without conceding that they are a category in theological definition and have epistemological priority. More will be said concerning this topic shortly in a section dealing with "an epistemological perspective". Fourth, Stott responds to the reality of poverty in purely individual terms speaking of three options for rich Christians in their handling of their possessions (1984:223-230). He earlier refers to oppression in the Old Testament and a sociological analysis which sees the major cause of British poverty in an unequal division of resources, but in his discussion of poverty the oppression of groups is not a factor which he uses to guide Christian reaction to this social reality (1984:218,223). In this approach he displays a standard evangelical individualism which emphasizes personal responsibility and underplays social causes and remedies. The emphasis here is much more on poverty in terms of personal morality rather than social struggle. For this reason I have called this approach "Special *Individual* Concern." Progressives, of which Stott is a leading example, do have a genuine, compassionate, and sometimes sacrificial concern for the poor, but they lack a sharply defined perspective of oppression as a "collective phenomenon" which calls for a more communal and socially relevant response.

Michael Cassidy takes a similar approach to that of John Stott. He also expresses dislike of the term "bias" and a preference for the idea of a ministry priority towards the poor (1989:327). His interpretation of "good news for the poor" is even more prone to spiritualizing than that of Stott for he speaks of "spiritual understanding" as the "primary" meaning of the Luke 4:18-19 passage (1989:329).

These reflections point to limitations in the approach of the "progressive traditionalists". These theological and hermeneutical factors inhibit an effective and credible evangelical response to poverty-oppression. It is in the radical wing of evangelicalism, I believe, that we see potential for a theology more able to cope with this reality.

2.2. Key Distinctions between Radical and Other Evangelicals

The further one reflects on the nature of a radical evangelical theology of the poor the more it becomes apparent that there are significant differences between it and other evangelical approaches to this issue. These distinctions cannot be accounted for only in terms of ethical application or merely as variations of political conviction. They are theological in nature and point to differing formulations which suggest that significantly differing evangelical theologies do exist. It is a myth to imagine that we can speak of evangelical theology as a kind of monolithic entity which exists in stark contrast to all other theologies. Within the evangelical community the following theological distinctions between radicals and others, concerning the poor, are evident.

2.2.1. Definition of the Gospel

In an earlier reference to the Manila Manifesto (see chapter two) the point was made that radical evangelicals differed from the dominant tradition by emphasis on the poor in terms of theological definition and not only ethical application.

In contrasting the approach of Wayan Mastra and Vinay Samuel with that of Western evangelical theology Chris Sugden has written:

> ...in Western evangelical theology the biblical definition of the good news to (sic) the kingdom as good news to the poor is emptied of its biblical content. Western evangelical theology argues that the rich need the gospel as much as the poor, for they too have individual souls that need to be saved. So "poor" is defined in purely individual spiritual terms which can also be applied to the rich. This process of biblical interpretation is carried out by Western evangelical theology which is shaped in the economically most powerful cultures in the world. This effectively denies to the poor of the world the full meaning of the very news which is said by the Bible to be good for them (1988:472).

This is the major point of distinction in a radical theology of the poor. Its distinctive character will be further clarified as we proceed in this chapter.

2.2.2. Spiritualizing poverty

In our earlier section on the identity of the poor we dealt with this theme in some detail. At this point it is sufficient to note that even progressive evangelicals such as Stott and Cassidy have an emphasis which clearly encourages the perpetuation of the spiritualizing of this concept. This is particularly apparent in Cassidy's interpretation of Luke 4:18-19 in which he says that "there is a primary spiritual understanding of Jesus' words in the Nazareth manifesto, with the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed all being understood in spiritual terms, and then a

secondary sense in which they are to be literally understood" (1989:329). In an earlier section in chapter two I believe I have shown the inadequacy of this view. Making the idea of spiritual poverty primary not only reverses the biblical order in the gospels where literal poverty is clearly primary and spiritual poverty may sometimes (very occasionally) be in view, but it confuses the issue entirely by failing to read the text in its historical context and creating an artificial "spiritual" interpretation of scripture which effectively reduces its social impact.

> ...the biblical picture is that the good news for the poor defines and shapes the good news for everyone else. The Bible affirms that the gospel is for everyone. But it defines the content of that gospel by what it means to the poor in scripture. The good news to the rich must include a readjustment of their relationship to the poor. The spiritualisation of the term "poor" in the reading of the Bible is thus both unscriptural, denies the poor the full content of the gospel and denies those who interpret the term in this way the full content of the gospel as well (Sugden 1988:472-473).

The contrast in the viewpoints represented by Cassidy and Sugden clearly illustrates the significant distinction between radical and other evangelical perspectives in regard to the spiritualization of poverty.

2.2.3. Causes of Poverty

Here radical evangelicals differ from the mainline tradition also, for there is a basic "divide... between those who would say that the principle thing that shapes poverty is the oppression of those who keep people poor, and those who would deny this" (Samuel, Sugden 1983:133). Our earlier consideration of biblical teaching on poverty suggested that, particularly in the Old Testament, oppression is regarded as its primary cause.

Robert Fowler in writing of "Evangelical Political Thought" in America between 1966-1976 and referring to the theme of "the poor

and the rich" speaks of the different approaches of three kinds of evangelicals; conservatives, reform-minded, and radicals (1982:185). He sees differences in degree of concern between these groups but goes on to locate the essential distinction between them in a sense of "class judgment" in which radicals hold the rich responsible for the poverty of the poor. "It is one thing to bewail the condition of the poor and to acknowledge its evil from a biblical vision, but it is quite another to blame the rich, often mercilessly" (1982:186). While it is true that radicals may sometimes be overly judgmental of the rich, they do represent a social perspective backed by biblical precedent which rightly locates the major cause of poverty in the exploitation and greed of the rich. In this critical analysis radical evangelicalism embodies a perspective which makes it more able to meet the needs of the poor than does the more generalized analysis of mainline evangelicalism, for its analysis takes structural causes of poverty more seriously and more consistently calls for holistic and social remedies.

2.2.4. Importance assigned to Context

A major difference between the radical approach and that of other evangelicals lies in the emphasis placed on context by radicals. This has direct implications for the way in which the poor are seen. Where contextual realities are emphasized a more particular and concrete interpretation emerges whereas where these are ignored the approach is more general and universal. It is, I believe, impossible to speak meaningfully of taking an option for the poor without engaging in an analysis of social situations and allowing these to shape the way in which understanding is gained and action regulated. In this radical evangelicals are developing a contextual theology which contains immense potential for the service of the poor, whereas well meaning conservative and even reformist efforts often lack credibility among the poor and lack the potential for effective social engagement because they appear less directly related to life situations. The whole theme of con-

textualization will be more fully developed in the following chapter.

2.2.5. Views of Justice

In the mainline evangelical tradition the idea of impartiality lies at the heart of the concept of justice. Its major emphasis is that God has no favourites. While there is some validity in a view of general divine impartiality, as it is often presented in conservative evangelicalism the concept does not adequately reflect a biblical view of justice. In our survey of radical evangelical perspectives on the poor we considered Stephen Mott's emphasis that "in the bible justice is primarily spoken of as activity on behalf of the disadvantaged". While Mott acknowledges that impartiality is a factor in aspects of biblical justice (e.g. criminal justice) he does not place this at the centre of his exposition of justice (1982:71-72). In this, I believe, we have another example of a basic distinction between radical and other evangelicals.

3. A Preferential Option for the Poor

"This phrase (the option for the poor) burst upon the ecclesiastical scene only a few years ago. Since then it has become the most controversial religious term since the Reformer's cry, 'salvation by faith alone'" (Nolan 1985:189). This quote from Donal Dorr reflects the ferment produced in Catholic thought through liberation theology with which this formulation has mainly been associated. It came to prominence at Puebla,3 although in previous years it had also been used (Gutierrez 1988:xxvi).

This formula is, I believe, eminently suitable for expressing a radical evangelical theology of the poor. In my view its emergence within theologies of liberation is no reason whatever why it should not be used by evangelicals to describe their theology, if

it is an adequate vehicle for its expression. At the heart of the theology of the poor developing within this thesis is this concept of a preferential option for the poor.

3.1. A Divine Preference

At the heart of this theology of the poor is the affirmation that God stands on the side of the poor and oppressed. This implies a divine preference or favouring of those who comprise this group.

Our consideration of "the Bible and the Poor" in the second chapter indicated that there is ample biblical support for this contention. Gustavo Gutierrez has written:

> The entire Bible beginning with the story of Cain and Abel, mirrors God's predilection for the weak and abused of human history. This preference brings out the gratuitous or unmerited character of God's love. The same revelation is given in the evangelical Beatitudes, for they tell us with the utmost simplicity that God's predilection for the poor, the hungry, and the suffering is based on God's unmerited goodness to us.
>
> The ultimate reason for commitment to the poor and oppressed is not to be found in the social analysis we use, or in human compassion, or in any direct experience we ourselves may have of poverty. These are all doubtless valid motives that play an important part in our commitment. As Christians, however, our commitment is grounded, in the final analysis, in the God of our faith. It is a theocentric, prophetic option that has its roots in the unmerited love of God and is demanded by this love.... the poor deserve preference not because they are morally or religiously better than others, but because God is God, in whose eyes "the last are first" (1988:xxvii-xxviii).

Something of this same perspective is reflected in Karl Barth when he writes: "God always takes his stand unconditionally and passionately on this side and on this side alone: against the lofty and on behalf of the lowly; against those who already enjoy right and privilege and on behalf of those who are denied it and deprived of it" (1957:386).

This is a major biblical teaching often ignored by conservative evangelicals. The words of Sider highlight this neglect:

> I recently talked with the head of a large evangelical agency about the important biblical teaching that God is on the side of the poor. "How", he asked in perplexed reflection, "could I study and then teach at evangelical colleges and seminaries and never become aware of this central biblical theme until this year?" How indeed! The scriptures have just as much to say about the fact that God is on the side of the poor as they do about the resurrection of Jesus. And yet evangelicals have insisted on belief in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as a criterion of orthodoxy and largely neglected the fact that God is on the side of the poor (Costas 1979:x-xi).

The term "preference" indicates that God makes a choice between people. It shows that, whatever the reason, the weak, disadvantaged, poor, and oppressed occupy a special and unique place in his concern. The option however is preferential, not exclusive. This special loving consideration for poor people does not deny God's universal love for all. The "choice" of the poor does not mean personal rejection of the non-poor, for through the same incarnation in which the poor are clearly favoured the love of God for all people is displayed. Gutierrez has said that the word "preference" denies exclusiveness, it calls attention to those who are the first, but not the only, objects of God's concern (1988:xxxvi). In another volume he writes of God: "His love is universal, yes, but it is from a point of departure in his preference for the poor that he manifests his universal love, his love for all humanity" (1983:106).

This concept tells us a great deal about God. It says that the God shown to us in Jesus of Nazareth is one whose compassion cannot prevent him from coming to the side of those exploited and misused, whose nature is always to take the part of those who in his perfect understanding he sees to be the victims in life's unequal struggle. It suggests that before we can speak of the universal scope of God's love we must see it first in the context of its concrete

manifestation in specific historic situations where God takes the side of the disadvantaged.

3.2. A Contextual Affirmation

Some writers do not hesitate to speak of God having a bias towards the poor. David Sheppard has entitled a book he has written *Bias to the Poor*. Vinay Samuel has written: "We see the servanthood of Jesus and the disciples in the economic sphere as fundamentally a bias to the poor" (1981:27). Sugden writes of Samuel that he sees the kingdom of God as "good news to the poor, which demonstrates a particular bias to the poor" (1988:319). Andrew Kirk writes of "the bias of the Christian gospel" which shows God as the one "who defends the cause of the 'hungry'and who sends 'the rich empty away'" (Mott 1982:viii). Stephen Mott connects this term to God's justice and says: "Because biblical justice shows a bias towards the poor..., we can describe it as the taking upon oneself of the cause of those who are weak in their own defense" (1982:72).

Some evangelicals however, find this term unacceptable. Michael Cassidy says, "I do not much like the vocabulary of 'bias'" (1989:327). John Stott writes: "I am uncomfortable with the word 'bias', since its commonest meaning is 'prejudice', and I do not think God is 'biassed' in that sense" (1984:221). It must be granted that this is a problematic term, especially from certain evangelical perspectives. However, it must be asked, what is it that makes the term "bias" a problematic one? I suggest it is a failure to think in a contextual way. Whether or not one feels free to speak of bias in God depends on whether one thinks and speaks of God contextually.

I submit that if one looks at the disadvantaged situation of the poor and sees a necessity for "redress" (Mott 1982:65-66), that is their need for special consideration in view of the disadvantages they suffer, then within this context there will be little problem

with the notion of God's bias. It will be seen as a manifestation of his grace in meeting a special need. In this way favouring the poor might be thought of as similar to the way in which a person "favours" an injured foot by treading more gently on it.4 If however, favouring the poor is thought of in terms of absolute election (the outright choice and approval of one and the rejection of another), then this idea becomes a threat to God's universal love and is unacceptable.

If God is thought of in purely metaphysical terms apart from the inequalities of the human situation, then the expression "bias" will mean prejudice and will be seen as inconsistent with justice. The issue is the way in which we think of God. My contention is that we cannot think of him in other than contextual terms, that is in relationship to the world which he has made and in which he has revealed himself. It is a fundamental evangelical assumption that we only know God on the basis of his self revelation. This revelation is, in the words of Orlando Costas, "God's saving word amidst the frail and fallible reality of human history" (1989:4). It is "not to be understood simply as a codification of concepts or propositions, but as history-making creative events, pregnant with meaning" (Costas 1989:3). This historically specific view of God's self-disclosure leads towards a contextual rather than metaphysically abstract knowledge of God. It implies that our knowledge of him is conditioned by the realities of our historical existence, we do not have direct access to his ultimate being except as this may be communicated in our history. In a metaphysical orientation, the historical context plays a lesser role and the communication of universal propositions and abstract concepts becomes more prominent. I see this as a problem in conservative evangelicalism and a factor in its non-contextual emphasis.

If, as I contend, our knowledge of God is historically dependent, then we must ask: What is the context in which this knowledge is communicated to us? The incarnation tells us that this is a context of weakness and poverty. It says that the knowledge of God

comes in a servant form. It also says something concerning the particular way in which we should pursue our understanding of God. It implies that metaphysically abstract emphases are inappropriate for they tend to exist in isolation from life's painful realities as "objective" formulations which are valid irrespective of human situations. It is rather through the medium of historically concrete emphases that we best understand the divine nature. This contextual perception is, I believe, consistent with a view in which God appears as the God of the poor and in which his bias towards them is not a threat to concepts of universal love, but rather a means to such concepts. If in the incarnation the knowledge of God is offered to all through the originally concrete identification of Jesus with the weak and poor, then it follows that acceptance of the concept of a divine bias for the poor need not indicate exclusivity and prejudice but rather point to the way in which God chooses to mediate his love to all. God's preference for the poor relates to the way in which our knowledge of him is perceived and points towards a servant form of this knowledge. It leads to a theology which rises from the situation of the poor and emphasizes understanding "from below". It is a contextual perspective which sets us free to affirm God's preferential option for the poor and to hear its call to our own action in this regard.

3.3. A Social Commitment

We have been speaking mainly of God's option for the poor. The complementary aspect is the option of those who are disciples of Jesus Christ. The implication here is that by commitment to Christ Christians also commit themselves to the poor, for to be on the side of God is to be on the side of those with whom he identifies. Gutierrez in the Introduction to the second edition of *A Theology of Liberation* considers the preferential option for the poor under the heading; "Opting for the God of Jesus" (1988:xxv). Pixley and Boff in emphasizing the theological character of an option for the poor say:

> At root, it is because Christians opt for Christ and for the Father of Jesus Christ that they opt for the poor....It is just this that makes the difference between the Christian community's option for the poor and that of any other group or social movement. For Christians, their option for the poor is not and cannot be a primary movement, but is derived from an earlier option: their option for Jesus Christ, Lord of history....These are not really two options, but two dimensions or aspects of one and the same commitment (1989:115).

If commitment to Christ and the poor is an essential part of discipleship the question must be faced: What exactly does this option for the poor involve? Does it only imply simple lifestyle and sympathy on the part of the more privileged for the disadvantaged? Is it an option only for individually poor people to whom special service is rendered or does it have a corporate reference? These are questions which raise the issue of the social and political nature of this option. It is my contention that an option for the poor unavoidably implies social commitment.

At this point in our discussion the contribution of Albert Nolan is extremely helpful. He writes:

> Option for the poor can mean an option for some *people* over against other people, or it can mean an option for one *cause* over against another cause. These are two different options and they should not be confused.
>
> The option for *people* who are poor is a choice about the people *to whom* we will preach the gospel, give pastoral care, give assistance and so forth. That option can never be exclusive, at least not for the Church as a whole. It must be preferential.
>
> On the other hand, the option for the cause of the poor is a moral judgment about which cause is right and just and which cause is wrong and sinful. Here it is not a question of *to whom* you will preach but what you will preach to everyone and anyone. It simply makes no sense to speak of this option as preferential and not exclusive. We do not simply prefer justice to injustice; we do not opt for justice in a non-exclusive manner. We do exclude and reject sin and injustice.
>
> It is when these two meanings of the term option for the poor are confused that we get objections like: But not all the rich are sinners and all the poor are not saints.

> Of course not. The issue is not about individual people but about the causes and interests of social groups or classes. That is what is being judged and opted for and against (Nolan, Broderick 1987:48-49).

This analysis of Nolan's highlights the fact that a social commitment is an essential part of opting for the poor. At this point the option is no longer preferential, it is exclusive. It involves a choice concerning what stand will be taken in areas of social conflict. In the decisions and commitments that are made in this regard social analysis is of prime importance, for alignments within society are determined by the ways in which society is viewed. It is here that, I believe, our consideration of God's bias towards the poor is relevant socially and politically. This says that while God has a preferential option for the poor in terms of his concern and care for people, he has an exclusive option for the poor in terms of the support of their cause. That is he stands on their side in their conflict with the rich because in the incarnation God has demonstrated that he has taken the side of the powerless against the powerful and made their cause his own. This does not mean a blanket endorsement of all attitudes, actions, strategies or policies related to the struggle of the poor, but it does mean an overall divine identification with the cause represented in this struggle in so far as it is a struggle against human oppression. Christian involvement in this struggle implies commitment grounded in this vision of God's preference and an analysis of society informed by these perspectives. That is, it is recognized that at the heart of social conflict lies the struggle between oppressors and oppressed.5 Although this may not be the only category for accounting for social division, it certainly is fundamental to an understanding of the dynamics of human conflict and extremely relevant to the situation in South Africa.

In this context many evangelicals speak of the need for the church to remain a neutral force in the midst of social conflict. Derek Morphew in his book *South Africa: The Powers Behind* is an example of this. He takes as his departure point the separation of church

and state which he interprets in terms which restrict Christian involvement in the struggle for a just society. That is, because the Christian way is seen to transcend the agendas of those involved in political conflict, Christians cannot commit themselves to any of these political agendas. God is not seen as identifying with the cause of the poor in concrete historical terms but as bringing in a kingdom which is radically distinct from the kingdoms of this world. He writes: "South African Christians need to walk on a knife edge. They need to be identified with suffering humanity but totally unidentified with the ideological (sectarian) value systems of this world" (1989:192). He is saying in effect that Christians must identify with the poor, but not with their struggle. At the heart of his perspective is a view of God's redemptive action as confined to the sphere of the church and a related view of the fallenness of human nature and structures which creates suspicion of the basis upon which the struggle for justice in society is conducted. Later some aspects of these issues will be considered, but at this stage it is sufficient to note that Morphew's view of the church's social neutrality represents a form of evangelicalism which differs significantly from the radical perspective presented in this theology of the poor. At issue is the question of the social commitment arising from the perception of God's option for the poor as an option for their cause, and the application of this in concrete historical circumstances.

The evangelical approach we have been discussing is sometimes referred to as "third way theology". Tony Balcomb has defined such theologies as "those theologies that approach socio-political issues in a way that seeks to transcend the agendas of the power arrangements that prevail within the social arena because these arrangements are perceived to be inspired by a conflict of nationalisms" (1989:47). Morphew is an example of this approach when he says that:

> The Christian response to injustice must be a reflection of a totally different perspective. Christians are always an alternative community to the polarization of society. The insistence on 'taking sides' again assumes

> a dialectical analysis of society which is Hegelian, not Christian (1989:181).

I believe this approach to be inadequate for at least three reasons. First, Morphew in the above statement seems to assume that Christians possess a "world view" which exempts them from the social and cultural conditioning which other people experience. Experience teaches otherwise. Christians, no less than others, gain understanding in a given context which shapes the way in which society is seen. There is no such thing as a Christian "world view" derived directly from the bible which provides understanding free from the prejudices and self interest which affect other people. The perspectives of the kingdom of God which Christians believe are witnessed to in scripture are read by them through the "spectacles" of their own social and cultural situations. This factor needs to be taken into account when we speak of a so-called Christian view of society.

Second, this view of Morphew's cannot account for the fact, that in South Africa where some seventy eight per cent of the population claim to be Christian the so-called "alternative community" has historically proved to be a bastion of the oppressive system. The phenomenon of right wing religion and the wide spread involvement of the born again Christian community in the support and legitimation of the apartheid system seriously undermines this idealistic argument. Morphew's assumption that there is a Christian analysis of society which contrasts with all other analyses is seriously undermined by the socio-political record of those (in this instance evangelicals) who profess to adhere to the so-called "Christian world view". Despite a degree of social awakening and some opposition to apartheid policies, such evangelical Christians have not constituted a threat to the apartheid system nor been seen by the authorities as such. To talk in "third way" terms is to avoid this contextual reality.

It is interesting to note some of the similarities between the South African and Latin American situations. Both are contexts in

which the poor have been ruthlessly oppressed. Both have a high level of Christian influence, in South Africa Protestant, in Latin America Roman Catholic. In both cases this influence has been mainly of a conservative, system-supporting nature. This, in its Latin American setting, is reflected by Orlando Costas when he writes:

> The most ironic aspect of Latin American societies is that the more religious they feel, the more they deny God. How can one explain the fact that practically all the Latin American dictators profess to be Christians, defending the Christian cause?...How can one explain torture, imprisonment without trial, and persecution in countries where so much has been said and is being said about the gospel of love (1982:36)?

The parallels to the South African situation are self evident; the problem just as acute. I suggest that in such situations, where the church so obviously destroys its witness to Christ, there is only one way for it to achieve any credibility and that is through becoming a church of the poor. This will mean not only to be a church composed of the poor, but also in its broader composition to be a church where the concerns, the perspectives, and the leadership of the poor are given preference.

Third, this third way approach of Morphew's is also inadequate because it does not take God's option for the poor seriously enough. As we have already noted, to opt for the God of Jesus is to opt for the poor in terms of our concrete historical situations. To place this perspective on the poor where it belongs, at the centre of our theology and mission, is to deny the kind of neutrality which is assumed in Morphew's approach.

At the heart of this discussion lies the question: What is the basis for Christian social action? There are at least two ways in which evangelicals try to answer this question. The first is by reference to God as creator and to Christians as having responsibility to the whole of creation. Though true enough this view is inadequate. It is fairly common among more progressive evangeli-

cals and is often accompanied by a dualistic emphasis which divides sharply between creation and covenant, church and state. This produces the kind of "third way" restraints on social action we have already noted. A second basis for social action is that which grounds it in the kingdom of God. In this view the kingdom is seen as God's reign not only in spiritual and eschatological perspective, but also as a reality which impinges on and transforms all of life. Through the coming of Christ the kingdom has been inaugurated and is present in the world, though its final consummation will only take place at the return of Christ. Christ in his incarnation and teaching presents a model of servanthood which is characteristic of the kingdom. In this model the service of the poor is of central significance. Vinay Samuel has written:

> God was at work through the servant ministry and lifestyle of Jesus taking the side of the poor and the victims of current injustices to enable them to achieve full humanity. Disciples were to image this servanthood, to serve as the Son of Man served, by making their talents and resources available without limit to enable the humanisation and the fulfillment of others, especially the poor (1981:18).

Perceived from this kingdom perspective, social action is not inhibited in the same way as it is from the creation based view we have noted. Samuel has argued that in his political, social, economic, and religious context, Jesus took a certain stance (1981:16). He called his disciples to this and exemplified it in his servant ministry in which the poor were central. Samuel writes: "to be a disciple of Jesus meant being a member of the kingdom community and following a master who had a particular social stance. Jesus, as an integral part of calling and training disciples, made them take a particular socio-economic and political stance towards the situations of their day" (1981:18).

Samuel does not, however, develop the implications of this kingdom view for social action today. I think his application of his excellent material on discipleship is inadequate and does not sufficiently relate the implications of Jesus' identification with the

poor to the situations of our day. He writes: "The calling to us as disciples today is to discover in our own context what stance we should focus on. Discipleship involves taking the stance that Jesus wants us to focus on in our context" (1981:37). To this we may add, that the stance of Jesus and his disciples in relation to the situation of the poor of his time, implies that modern disciples should commit themselves in society to those causes which favour the weak and powerless and thereby become part of the struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. To do so is not necessarily, as Morphew alleges, for Christians to sell their loyalty to some secular pressure group (1989:194), but rather to follow Jesus in service which reflects the concern of his kingdom to "lift up the humble" and "fill the hungry with good things" (Luke 1:52-53). In this way a theology of the poor becomes a major motivating factor in social commitment and action.

3.4. A Theology of Justice

The social commitment of a preferential option for the poor involves a theology of justice. This is the implication of our discussion thus far. A theology of the poor can hardly avoid being a theology which is social and political, for its understanding of Christian life and mission includes responsibility in the public sphere.

3.4.1. Justice and an Option for the Poor

In the previous chapter we noted Stephen Mott's emphasis that justice is closely connected to the welfare of the poor. This substantial biblical material supports the identification of a theology of the poor with its preferential option as a theology of justice. A similar emphasis to that of Mott's appears in a quote from Howard Snyder:

> In the Old Testament, God's concern with the poor consistently appears within the context of the justice of

> God and the working of justice among God's people. Thus, biblically, words such as the poor, the needy, the oppressed, the sojourner, typically have moral content, relating to God's requirement for justice.
>
> This is not easily apprehended in today's world because "the poor" does not have such a moral content for us. It has a purely descriptive sense; one might say that for us it is a purely secular word. But what we must see is that poverty itself is of ethical significance - the poor is a moral category. In God's world there is no human condition which escapes moral significance; and the poor, and the treatment they receive are strong indicators of the faithfulness of God's people (Scott 1980:241).

This moral content of the word "poor" implies that commitment to the poor is the same as commitment to justice which itself is related to commitment to God. Pixley and Boff have put it in this way: "Opting for Jesus necessarily means opting for justice, and opting for justice means opting for the poor - those to whom injustice is done" (1989:124).

The important point here is that this option for justice is not a secondary element of faith as often appears among evangelicals where an emphasis on evangelism (spiritual conversion) overshadows or excludes an emphasis on justice.

> According to the apostle Paul the good news of salvation includes the revelation of God's justice (Rom. 1:17). Justice is not a secondary topic in God's economy. We learn in the Old Testament that justice is a fundamental question in God's relationship to humanity (e.g. Mic. 6:8). God deals with all creatures on the basis of justice and expects just dealings among them. Upon this principle has God established human society (Costas 1982:29).

Despite the fact that there has been some awakening to justice concerns among evangelicals in recent times this remains hesitant and somewhat ambivalent. One reason for this is that evangelicals do not include justice as part of their central gospel message but add it on as an outcome of this. Chris Sugden has written:

> The evangelical community worldwide is still not known for its full commitment to justice. We suggest that one reason is that a gospel tailored to people's individual

> needs does not include the demand and commitment to social righteousness. When justice is raised later, people feel that more conditions are being attached to Christian discipleship than they allowed for (1988:456).

A central factor here is an option for the poor. Evangelical failure in the area of justice stems from a theology in which the poor are not given the recognition accorded them in scripture. Where an option for the poor is taken in a discipleship commitment influenced by the stance of Jesus in his human context, the issue of justice moves to the centre of consciousness. Further, where the gospel is understood in its original context as "good news to the poor", then justice is included within the essential message of Christian proclamation.

3.4.2. An Economic Option for the Poor

In a discussion of justice and the poor the topic of economics is important. In a previous section we noted radical evangelical emphases concerning relationships between commitment to the poor and economic issues. At this point this topic needs to be related to an option for the poor, for the terms in which we have spoken of this option imply taking an economic option for the poor as well. I see three aspects to this economic option.

First, this option implies taking a view of society and economics in which assessment is made on the basis of the ways in which policies affect the poor. Reference has already been made to this in a previous section regarding economic exploitation in South Africa. Here it needs to be emphasized that an option for the poor cannot avoid this implication. Because economic factors relate so closely to the situation of the poor and the question of justice, this principle needs clear establishment; opting for the poor implies opting for a rectifying of their economic disadvantage in society. If this involves acceptance of policies which reduce the affluence of those with abundance for the enrichment of those with

very little, then I believe that in principle this should be accepted as an expression of a Christian view of the way in which society should be ordered. In this regard it is both beyond my purpose and my expertise to discuss economic theory in any depth, but at least the concept of those with much having responsibility towards those with little accords with a biblical view of sharing in the church (Acts 2:45-46, 2 Cor. 8:13-14, 2 Thess.3:6-13). This in turn, I believe, has relevance for society, for the church ideally exists as a model of God's kingdom community in the present world which witnesses to God's purposes for society at large.

Second, an economic option for the poor is informed by a biblical understanding which accentuates equality and sharing rather than the unbridled right of individuals to accumulate wealth. Jim Wallis has written:

> The Scriptures are not neutral on questions of economics. The God of the Bible is emphatically on the side of the poor and the exploited....
>
> Nowhere in Scripture are the rights of the rich proclaimed; nowhere is God seen as the Savior and defender of the rich and their wealth; nowhere are the poor exhorted to serve the rich and be poor for the sake of the wealthy. Throughout Scripture, however, the rights of the poor are proclaimed; God is revealed as their Savior, deliverer and avenger; the rich are instructed to serve the poor and relinquish their wealth and power for the sake of the poor (1986:64).

Here Wallis clearly enunciates God's bias for the disadvantaged. That this does not contradict God's justice is evident from the fact that in scripture the poverty of the poor is related to the wealth of the rich. Therefore their enrichment at the expense of the rich is not seen as injustice but as redressing inequality.

Andrew Kirk summarizes a biblical view of wealth as follows:

> We can conclude then, that the economic system set out by God in the provision of the covenant, and backed by the uncompromising stand of the prophets, Jesus and the apostles was geared to satisfying the needs of every person (and particularly those unprotected in society).

> Our present economic order - a far cry from any idealised society based on the Christian values of hard work, compassion and sharing - is basically a want-satisfying system. It is this fact that creates the great disparities in living standards across the globe (1983:75).

Three, an economic option for the poor suggests that we should bring critical focus to bear more on the dangers posed by those systems which threaten the poor than on those which are seen to threaten the rich. This, I believe, has implications for a Christian response to communism. Focusing on the threat to the poor rather than the rich is not intended to imply that the implementation of Marxist economic theory will necessarily enrich the poor, it does suggest however, a greater openness to varying socialist economic options, an awareness of the negative influences of capitalism, and a willingness to judge economic systems by what they do to the "have nots" rather than by their protection of the rights of the "haves". The problem created by right wing religion is that it has made its anti-communist crusade a platform for the defence of a capitalism weighted heavily in favour of the wealthy. At the same time it has produced stereotypes of "godless communism" as a threat to Christianity which it uses as instruments for the entrenchment of the rich and the continued impoverishment of the poor. Evangelicals have too often been inhibited from supporting the cause of the poor through the influence of such anti-communist propoganda which has identified those who struggle for the poor as "communists". In my view the critique most relevant in a South African situation is one which exposes the dangers of our consumerist society and its effects on the disadvantaged, rather than that which focuses on a so-called communist threat to the Christian faith. The economic factor most threatening to Christian faith is that which encourages unbridled accumulation and neglects the poor in favour of the rich. Martin Luther King has said:

> The profit motive, when it is the sole basis of an economic system, encourages a cut throat competition and selfish ambition that inspires men to be more concerned about making a living than making a life....Capitalism may lead to a practical materialism that is as pernicious as the theoretical materialism taught by Communism (1963:102-103).

A theology of justice then, reflects a preferential option for the poor by viewing justice as integrally connected to the welfare of the poor and an essential part of the Christian mission, and by taking those economic options in society which favour the deprived.

3.5. An Epistemological Perspective

In our theology of the poor our concern is not only with the effect the poor have on our understanding of God and our social action, but also on the function of "the poor" as a category that influences our way of knowing. In speaking of theology there are three major aspects which are emerging in this thesis. First, there is the content of theology, that vision of God beginning to emerge in the discussion of him as the God of the poor. Second, there is a theology of action relating to the questions discussed in the previous two sections, leading on to the missiological issues to be developed in the final chapter. Third, there is a theological method relating to the discussions to be introduced in this section and pursued in the next chapter. Thus our developing theology is theology proper (in its narrower sense), an understanding of God. It is also missiology, because this understanding of God has clear implications for Christian mission. It also has a hermeneutical aspect because our understanding of God and mission depend on methods of interpretation.6 These three aspects intertwine in our theology of the poor and cannot always be clearly separated for they constantly impinge on one another. Our method influences our theology and mission, but in turn is itself influenced by them, for we do not begin to do theology and mission from scratch but from a context where our presuppositions are deeply influenced by what we understand of God and his call.

The concept that the poor are a category for theological understanding with its implication that a theology of the poor concerns hermeneutical method is evident in the thoúght of Vinay Samuel. We

have previously noted Sugden's statement (repeated more than once) that for Samuel "the meaning of the gospel for the poor in scripture defines the meaning of the good news for everybody" (1988:231, 291,472). Here the poor are used as a type of lens. It is through what the gospel means to them that its meaning is communicated to all. Samuel uses the analogy of Israel as mediators of God's grace to all people in Old Testament times to describe the situation of the poor in the New Testament setting (1988:232). The good news comes first to them that through them it may spread to all.

In this approach Samuel moves beyond the traditional evangelical notion of "mission priority" (Stott 1984:221,Cassidy 1989:327). This traditional evangelical kind of option for the poor implies that this people-group is particularly needy and open to the gospel and therefore are to be seen as prime objects for evangelistic activity. One expression of this is in the Church Growth Movement whose leading exponent Donald McGavran contends that the bible clearly demonstrates God's preference for the poor. "However, McGavran uses it only as the basis for a missionary strategy that will concentrate on the masses rather than the elite, in order to see numerical growth" (Escobar, 1978:46). Samuel's understanding is significantly different. For him the gospel is not only good news to the poor but good news *of* the poor. They are its heralds in the sense that through its meaning seen through their eyes it can be understood by all. "The meaning of this good news is to be focussed on what it means to the poor in order to gain its meaning for everybody" (Sugden 1988:291).

The issue raised by this perspective in Samuel's theology is whether an option for the poor plays a central role in the definition of the gospel. The answer to this question has considerable implications for evangelical theology and will be discussed in the final chapter. At this stage it needs to be noted that if the gospel can be defined without reference to the poor this means that concern for them need only be thought of in terms of ethical application of the central message. By implication, the good news

then can be preached to individuals in contexts of oppression without any reference to this contextual reality with the assumption that it has been fully preached and evangelistic responsibility been discharged. This makes all social reference an addendum to the central message and creates the all too common evangelical situation where so-called faithful gospel preaching takes place while contexts of oppression are ignored and oppressive systems implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) supported. This leads to the kind of scandal referred to by Orlando Costas when he speaks of the arrival of European missionaries in Latin America carrying the cross and the sword and enslaving "the indigenous and African population while announcing the message of salvation" (1982:35). In my view it is questionable whether ethical integrity towards oppressed and suffering people can be maintained if the "good news" proclaimed to them has no reference to their oppressed life situation as part of its essential meaning. Samuel's emphasis on the gospel defined by reference to the poor has potential for a theology of the gospel freed from the privatized and dualistic additions which in its conservative evangelical proclamation have often robbed it of its relevance and fullness.

It is in this area of the centrality of the poor to an understanding of the gospel that evangelicals need to learn from theologies of liberation. Albert Nolan in speaking of the proclamation of the good news in South Africa has said that "what we preach will not be the gospel of Jesus Christ, in fact it will be a false gospel, if it does not have this characteristic of being good news for everyone by being in the first place good news for the poor" (1988:13). In this emphasis, as in Samuel, there is a movement from the particular to the universal. The loss of the universal applicability of the gospel by its primary reference to the poor, feared so greatly by evangelicals, is only imagined. The gospel does not come first to the poor that it may remain there, but rather that through them its meaning may come to all. The particular emphasis on the poor in the synoptic gospels leads on to the more universal emphasis of the epistles. This original particularity should not

be ignored or reinterpreted by reading the universal back into it, as is so often done by evangelicals. Rather the movement from a particular and concrete origin to a universal emphasis suggests a pattern for understanding.7 Through the particular we should move to the universal, from the poor to all people. The place to begin our interpretation of the gospel is not in a universal statement like "God so loved the world" (John 3:16), but rather in a particular assertion such as "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor" (Luke 4:18).

Allan Boesak has spoken of this same tendency to move from the particular to the universal in black theology.

> It is a theology of liberation which makes the contextuality of Black Theology truly ecumenical and universal. In this sense Black Theology is not an exclusive theological Apartheid in which whites have no part. On the contrary , blacks know only too well the terrible estrangement of white people; they know only too well how sorely whites need to be liberated - even if whites themselves don't. Black Theology is a passionate call to freedom, and although it directs its voice to black people, it nonetheless hopes that white people will hear and be saved (1977:16).

An option for the poor then, is an understanding of God in terms of his preference for the poor. It is a perception gained within a contextual framework leading to a social commitment to justice and involving a method of knowing in which the poor are a key category. It means taking a stand on the side of the oppressed poor in incarnational service and commitment to their cause in society. It involves an option not only for those who are members of the "oppressed community" but also for those who are part of the "oppressor community", for in South Africa (as elsewhere) co-option of the oppressed by the oppressor is a common strategy. This kind of commitment involves a way of knowing in a servant form, in which God and his activity are understood from the perspective of the oppressed, the weak, and the lowly.

4. A Theology from the Underside

What we have just noted concerning the servant form of God's knowledge and its communication from a position of weakness and lowliness is a crucial concept for a theology of the poor. It tells us of the way of God in the world and of how followers of Jesus should understand reality in the context of God's kingdom. "At that time Jesus said, `I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children'" (Matthew 11:25). It says that in God's economy understanding is gained not from the vantage point of those at the top of life's ladder but those at its bottom. In a world context it focuses on the significance of theologies emerging from what American Methodist Bishop James Armstrong has called "the underside".

> Without question the Third World has been and continues to be a victim of our greed and self-centredness. The Third World is the *underside* of humanity. It is comprised of about one hundred underdeveloped countries inhabited by two billion people - many millions of whom exist in the shadows of disease and starvation. These are the have-not nations, the voiceless and powerless, the marginal ones. Often called the South (in contrast to the industrialized North) they are in fact, the underside of human existence, not only geographically but physically and politically. Yet, from Latin America, Africa, and Asia a theology and a heroic practice of the faith are emerging that may yet provide a key to holistic evangelism and a word of hope for the future (1981:26).

This understanding "from the underside" relates to a way in which the bible is read, from the perspective of the oppressed-poor. This concept has already been briefly noted in chapter three in our consideration of Vinay Samuel's hermeneutic concerning the bible as best understood from contexts of poverty.

An example of this phenomenon is the kind of reading taking place within Latin America. Richard Shaull has alluded to this in an ar-

ticle telling of his visit to a base Christian community near Santiago in Chile. His experience was one which he describes as "a new Pentecost" discovered in the midst of suffering. "I perceived that they had a depth of understanding of the gospel that I have rarely found among biblical exegetes". Speaking of his travels through Latin America he tells of meeting other North Americans whose experience of the base communities had been similar to his. Reflecting on these experiences he says:

> I concluded that two extraordinary things were happening here: that, for the poor in Latin America, the Bible had a clear, compelling, and *new* message, responding directly to their deepest concerns. Secondly, this understanding of the gospel and experience of God's presence was coming not from academic theologians or the cultural elite, but from poor and marginal people....
>
> Once again in the depths of a profound human crisis, Christians on the margins of the established order of privilege and power - Latin Americans and others in the third world, minorities and women in this society - have turned to the Bible. There they have found a message that speaks to their struggle: the God of the Bible is supremely concerned about the fullness of life - individual and collective, material as well as spiritual. What's more, the biblical God has a special concern for those to whom this life is denied - a "preferential option for the poor" (1989:42-43).

This perspective has particular relevance within the South African context. In April 1988 American evangelical social activist Jim Wallis visited Pietermaritzburg and addressed a group of Concerned Evangelicals. Speaking of his response to the South African situation he said that what impressed him immensely was the quality of the black church leadership leading the struggle against apartheid. What saddened him most was that these people leading the struggle for justice did not have the support of the white Christian community. "White Christians," he said, "are whispering in the ear of the system instead of standing with black Christians in the struggle". He related this to the American situation where the most powerful preaching and spirituality has come out of the black churches. "There is something about the experience of suffering", he said, "which produces this". I think these comments are sig-

nificant because they highlight the contextual reality that the biblical message has a special affinity to the life experience of oppressed peoples.

This affinity is reflected in some of the most significant Christian documents which have emerged from the South African conflict during the 1980s. In the Belhar Confession (*The Confession of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church of 1982*), the declaration is made:

> We believe that God has revealed himself... in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged and that he calls his Church to follow him in this; that he brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry; that he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind; that he supports the downtrodden... (Cloete, Smit 1984:3).

This emphasis is reflected in other similar documents that have followed the Belhar Confession. The same orientation to the concerns of the poor appears in *The Kairos Document*, *Evangelical Witness in South Africa*, and *The Road to Damascus*. These documents are all Christian formulations emerging from the experince of the poor and reflecting the context of oppressed communities. Their signatories are very predominantly part of these communities. Thus it is true to say that the reading of the bible from below in South Africa is an activity taking place primarily, perhaps almost exclusively, in the black context. This has significance because in the South African context "black" means poor and oppressed and a black perspective is one from the underside. This does not mean that all black Chriatians reflect this "black perspective", many are still dependent on imported Western theologies, but it is indisputable that this kind of theology from below is very predominantly emerging from the black community.

One of the most eloquent testimonies to this concept of "reading from below" is Albert Nolan's *God in South Africa.* Although there may be aspects of Nolan's emphasis which make even radical evangelicals feel uncomfortable, its emphasis on commitment to the struggle of the oppressed against the system, and perceiving

reality from the perspectives of the poor, reflect contextual realities with which they can easily identify. Nolan quotes a saying of Bonhoeffer's which epitomizes this view:

> There remains an experience of incomparable value. We have for once learnt to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled (1988:192).

These considerations are extremely relevant for South African evangelicals, for there is a significant difference between the approach of the white and the black communities which is important for understanding evangelicalism in this society. The view from Soweto where the pressing questions concern survival and liberation is vastly different from the view from white suburbia where questions may revolve around the effects of inflation on an accustomed comfortable life-style. Christians read the bible differently from these contrasting contexts. Reflecting on this, part of a report from a team of international evangelical visitors to South Africa (led by Chris Sugden) in April 1989 reads:

> ...we had to recognize that the Bible was read in different places and from such different perspectives that it seemed as if different Bibles were being read. For some biblical obedience meant leaving issues of political and social life severely alone and seeking unity in society at the level of church unity. For others biblical commitments were read from the perspectives of people whom those in control of political and social structures do not leave alone but harass, control and in many cases detain (*Transformation* 1989:22).

If the bible is read from the perspective of the poor and oppressed this has a profound effect on the way in which South Africa is viewed. This is, I believe, the key category for social analysis in this context. Taking a preferential option for the poor will mean assessing the situation and testing society on the basis of what it does to poor people. This factor will outweigh other criteria such as stability, security and order.

Sugden has pointed out how Samuel

> ...gives a role to the poor in the evaluation of a community's faith. Samuel stresses the place and challenge of the poor as the biblical acid test for the health of a whole society. A society is to be judged by how the poor fare (1988:408).

Trevor Huddlestone expressed this vision over 30 years ago in describing South Africa. "Of the beauty of its rich homes and gardens I will not write: for I have never been able to see that beauty without remembering the corrugated-iron shacks and the muddy yards where our African people live" (1956:15).

It must, of course, be noted that if commitment to the poor is only seen in personal terms as an ethical application of the gospel then it does not make much difference to the way we view society, except perhaps to create more general sympathy for the lot of poor people. But if opting for the poor involves the way in which we read the gospel (reading from below), then this brings about a paradigm shift which radically alters the way our context is perceived.

This theological and hermeneutical orientation challenges theological models evident in mainline, and particularly right wing evangelicalism. A leader of Concerned Evangelicals, Caesar Molebatsi, has described conservative theology as a "top-down" theology.8 This is an apt description, for such theology is characterized by hierarchical thought patterns. The movement of thought is from God down to humankind, from leader down to follower, from husband down to wife, from master down to servant and so on. Its effect is to foster a mode of thinking in which dominance is central. Within South Africa this has resulted in support for white control and authoritarian forms of government. Martin Prozesky has written: "We must ...recognise that biblically fundamentalist forms of the Christian religion in particular include certain important orthodox characteristics which might actually encourage a domination model of society" (1990:130). A radical evangelical theology of the poor denies these dominance models by its emphasis on a theology from the underside. This theology has an equalizing effect by lifting the lowly from their assumed in-

feriority and pursuing a vision of church and society in which partnership and democratic ideals are affirmed. In this model servanthood rather than authority is the central motivating principle. This emphasis denies servility and affirms the equal dignity of all, with special reference to those pushed to the bottom by society's hierarchical pressures. This kind of theology from the underside takes its primary inspiration from the incarnation of Jesus in which the affirmation of the lowest and the least is seen.

4.1. An Incarnational Emphasis

Orlando Costas has written, "Biblical contextualization is rooted in the fact that the God of revelation can only be known in history" (1982:5). This history in which God is known is above all an incarnational history, one in which he acts and is known in human flesh. This incarnational emphasis lies at the heart of a radical evangelical theology of the poor. But this incarnational emphasis is seen not only in the fact of God's appearing in human flesh but also in its manner. The incarnation affirms that God has shown his solidarity with the poor by coming into this world as a poor person and acting within our human history from this vantage point. The details of his appearing are not accidental. As Pixley and Boff have said: "it is not a matter of indifference that the Messiah should have appeared in the form of a poor worker and not that of an emperor; as one of the poor, not one of the rich and powerful" (1989:110-111). The form of Christ's coming reveals a divine affinity to those who suffer, a divine option not only for the "little ones" of history but also for the perspective they represent, for God has chosen to act in our history from the perspective of the poor.

Within the radical evangelical constituency it is particularly Oralndo Costas who has emphasized the significance of the incarnation for a theology of the poor. In his *Liberating News* he speaks of contextual evangelism in which people are addressed by God in

terms of their own time and space. This contextual reality is determined by the incarnation, "the point of departure for the communication of the gospel" (1989:24). He links the contextuality of the incarnation to its reference point in the life of the poor.

> Since God's Son took flesh in the person of a baby born in a manger, grew up in the household of a carpenter, and lived the social and cultural experience of the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed, we can state that in the gospel God not only speaks to humanity from its lowest and humblest situation but also takes advantage of its own symbols and creations to communicate the good news of salvation in a contextually relevant manner. This is the extraordinary affirmation made in the theme song of the Nicaraguan Peasants' Mass:
>
> > You are the God of the poor,
> > the human and sensitive God
> > the God who sweats in the street
> > the God with the sun scorched face.
> > That is why I speak to you
> > Just as my people talk,
> > For you are the God who labors
> > You are the worker, Christ. (1989:26-27).

Behind this contextual affirmation is the belief that God in emptying himself and "taking the form of a servant" (Philippians 2:5-8) has in Jesus become "part of history, identifying with its most humble expression and suffering its deepest pain" (1989:27). This means, says Costas, that

> We need to understand both humanity and the Son of God from the perspective of the poor, given the double fact that humankind is a social reality and that, in the story of Jesus, the Christ of God assumed the identity of a poor person. The poor are consequently, a central reference to God's identity. In them we see God's human face (1989:27-28).

Costas summarizes the implications of the incarnation in the following words:

> The fundamental reality of the Incarnation is that the Son of God took upon himself the identity of every human being but especially of the lowest of us - of the poor, the powerless and the oppressed. The Son of God appears unquestionably identified as the God of the poor and the disenfranchised who came to liberate, heal, and reconcile an alienated and death-prone world. Any spirit that does

> not affirm this truth is not the Spirit of Christ (1989:129).

But for Costas the incarnation not only reflects God's identification with the poor, it also asserts that in his mission God works from the periphery. In speaking of the incarnation as a departure point for communicating the gospel he says; "There cannot be evangelization without incarnation" (1989:24). This incarnational character in evangelization is seen as a "contextual evangelization (which) should have a sociohistorical foundation based on the periphery" (1989:62). He goes on to say

> The base is especially a *fundamental association rooted in the lowest level, or most marginal spaces, of society.* To say that evangelization needs a base rooted in the periphery is to advocate the popular or grass-roots sectors as evangelization's starting point and fundamental point of reference - sectors that in any society constitute, by and large, those rendered marginal in life and powerless in decision-making.
>
> If evangelization starts on the periphery of society, if it works from the bottom up, the good news of God's kingdom is vividly demonstrated and credibly announced as a message of liberating love, justice, and peace. When the gospel makes "somebody" out of the "nobodies" of society, when it restores the self-worth of the marginalized, when it enables the oppressed to have a reason for hope, when it empowers the poor to struggle and suffer for justice and peace, then it is truly good news of a new order of life - the saving power of God (1989:62).

I see this incarnational emphasis on evangelism from the periphery as challenging "top down" models of traditional evangelical theology and missiology in two respects.

First, it challeges tendencies to operate from the centres of human power and thereby "bless" them. Following his emphasis on the effects of an evangelization from the periphery Costas writes as follows:

> When evangelization begins at the centres of power, working from the top down, its content usually ends up by being an easy and cheap accommodation of the vested interests of the mighty and wealthy. In such instances evangelization suffers reduction, because the content of

> the gospel is truncated, turned into a private whitewash, manipulated to soothe the conscience of those who, by virtue of their position and power, control - economically, socially, politically, or culturally - the destiny of those on the fringes of society. An evangelistic endeavor geared in the first place to the "elite" of society usually ends up being absorbed by their power systems (1989:62).

This distortion of the gospel message to serve the interests of the rich and powerful projects the false notion that God affirms human structures of authority irrespective of their regard for the weak and disadvantaged.9 This uncritical endorsement of authority in turn creates a view of God blessing the centres of human power and revealing his presence in society through them. Even where the separation of church and world is emphasized, evangelical theology by its traditional doctrine of providence tends to perpetuate ideas of God's sovereign activity being conducted through the agency of strong human rulers, that is from the centre of the human stage. In contrast, a radical evangelical theology of the poor sees God operating from and present in the margins of society. His agents are not the high and mighty but the weak and lowly.10 He has chosen "the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;...the weak things of the world to shame the strong" (1 Corinthians 1:27). This biblical perspective favouring the periphery is also reflected in Hebrews 13:12-13 which reads: "Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore".

Costas has written on this theme of God on the margins in his exposition of the death of Jesus "outside the gate" as implying three things. First, there is "A New Place of Salvation", because the old idea of salvation confined to the central temple is replaced in Jesus by a move to the periphery. Second, there is a "Fuller Understanding of Mission", because the old idea of Israel as the showcase for the nations is replaced by an emphasis of witnessing to God's grace by "going to the crucified Son of God, outside the gates of our sacred compounds" (1982:192). This means that Chris-

tian mission must not be thought of in terms of building these sacred compounds, but as encountering Christ in the world of the "outsiders". Third, there is "A New Goal of Salvation and Mission", because the old tendency of Israel to be wrapped up in itself must be replaced by a new universal vision (1982:188-194). This emphasis of Costas sees God calling the church to move into the world of the outsiders challenging the sacred institutions which insulate so many from the basic issues of life. At its heart is a vision of God located on the fringes of human society, the one who in Jesus suffers "outside the gate".

A theology of the poor not only recognizes and formulates this view of God on the margins of society, but proceeds primarily from this context. It is in essence a third world theology, a formulation from the underside, a perspective reflecting the understanding of those pushed onto the periphery. Recognizing the significance of this kind of theology for facing the crisis in Christian thought, Rosemary Ruether has written: "For the foreseeable future the pioneering edge of thought will come...from places on the edge with little prestige, from the meetings and communities of those who can recognize this crisis, not as the 'end' but as the only avenue to new hope" (Kraft 1979:387).

Second, the incarnational emphasis of Costas also challenges the conservative evangelical tendency to think of God solely in terms of his transcendence, a tendency which often conspicuously avoids reference to his immanence. In its anxiety to combat "liberalism" and maintain a "high" view of God's sovereignty evangelicalism has lost the vision of God as the one in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Costas' emphasis is a badly needed corrective to this tendency. He sees God in the here and now active in concrete historical terms, and not according to the abstract, metaphysical categories which too often characterize so much of Western academic evangelical thought.

The absence of an emphasis on God's immanence in evangelical theology is reflected by Daniel Stevick in his critique of what he calls

"Protestant Scholasticism". He quotes some comments of D.W. Soper on Louis Berkhof (whose Systematic Theology is thought by many evangelicals to be the epitome of orthodoxy):

> He mentions that God is immanent as well as transcendent, but never refers to immanence again. The world, the historic process, does not appear in the book from the first page to the last. Berkhof's Bible, like his universe, is static. The treatment follows his usual distribution of the great themes - God, Man, Christ, Salvation, Church and Last Things. You do not begin, as Tillich does, with man the question, nor with God the answer; Berkhof begins, continues and ends with the Bible. It is his only epistemology; it is not a dialogue with man but a divine monologue (1964:55).

Compare this approach with that of Costas who in his profound biblical commitment follows a contextual and incarnational model in which ample space is created for an emphasis on God in his world as truly immanent. He writes:

> ...because of the incarnation, we cannot think of God as an abstract being, removed from human experience, face less and personally unidentifiable. God has a historical identity: that of Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth and the prophet from Galilee who suffered death on a cross and was raised from the dead by the Spirit. God is not absent from human history, but continues to be present in the Spirit of the risen Christ (2 Cor. 3:17) who indwells the life and witness of the church (1982:12).

A theology of the poor then, has an incarnational emphasis. It cannot accommodate "top down" models of thought nor be satisfied with the elitism and triumphalism implicitly present in much of mainline evangelical missiology. In its incarnational emphasis the thinking of radical evangelicalism shows a different orientation to that of the dominant community. Its theology is one characterized by a servant form of knowledge given it by its vision of God's bias for the poor and of Jesus whose identity is determined, not only by an eternal relationship to the Father, but also concretely in our history by his becoming the poor man from Nazareth.

4.2. A Christology from Below

In developing the implications of an incarnational emphasis Orlando Costas speaks in terms of its relevance in contemporary history.

> Jesus Christ has not only died once and for all but continues to bear upon himself the affliction and oppression of all human beings and shall continue to do so until the day of the final redemption - if all of this is Christologically true, then it must also be true that Jesus Christ is today one of the outcast and oppressed of the earth. Wherever there is oppression, there is the Spirit of Christ incarnated in the *experience* of the oppressed; there is God contextualized in the present history of the nonpersons of society.
>
> Insofar as Christ has assumed the identity of the hurt, he is one of them. We can affirm, accordingly, that Christ today is a black Southern African, a Latin American peasant, a Cambodian refugee, a homeless Palestinian, a persecuted Russian Jew, an orphan and homeless child, a humiliated female person. He is all of these things because he is truly human and truly God, the one for others, "God of the oppressed".
>
> It should not be a shock for us to hear it said that Christ is black or brown, persecuted or poor. For centuries he has been identified with Western symbols and categories. He has been thought of as either a white savior, the great European conquistador, the justifier of the rich and powerful, or the soother of the guilt-ridden conscience of oppressors (1982:13-14).

This implies that many Christians need to find Christ anew, for, says Costas, "Christ's *real* identity has been hidden from the eyes of an overwhelming number of Christians. How else can we explain the fact that in his name millions are being subjected to a continuous process of humiliation, suffering, and death" (1982:14).

It is significant that in the development of the radical evangelical movement, at the first conference held by third world mission theologians in Bangkok in March 1982, the focus was on Christology. The full title of the volume edited by Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden containing the papers from this conference is, *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World : Evangelical Christologies from the contexts*

of poverty, powerlessness and religious pluralism. The papers from this conference reflect a strong incarnational and contextual emphasis. They witness to the search for a Christology adequate for the needs of third world situations. They reflect on the inadequacies of Western formulations too easily reproduced in third world contexts.11 In the keynote address Orlando Costas spoke of the way the face of Jesus has been disfigured by images of him reflective of dominant and oppressive groups, as in the white theology of South Africa where Jesus has been identified with "the ruling ideology and the elitist power structure" (1984:5). Christology has also been manipulated to present a Christ treated as a private possession, where individualistic emphases and pietistic religiosity serve the economic interests of the rich and powerful (1984:9). Against this background third world evangelicals have sought an indigenous Christology reflective of their own contexts. In this search there are two themes which have emerged according to Costas.

> ...we begin to notice the formulation of Christological categories and themes that are in many ways indigenous to the Two Thirds World and are congruent with the New Testament witness. Among others two such categories and themes come to mind. One is the concept of Jesus Christ as the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, as revelation of God's own suffering....
>
> A second Christological category that has emerged is Jesus Christ as the wounded healer and judge, otherwise identified as "the liberator" (1984:8).

The New Testament emphasis that resonates most powerfully with third world situations is one which focuses primarily on the historical Jesus of the gospels, rather than the more abstract categories seen to be reflected in the epistles. This clearly contrasts with Western evangelical emphases. The implication here is that the epistles should be read in the light of the gospels rather than vice versa. Samuel has said: "Christian theology has suffered from reading Jesus through the eyes of Paul, instead of coming to Paul with the knowledge of the historical stances of Jesus" (1981:66). This suggests a Christological method starting from the

historical Jesus rather than the Christ of faith. This approach is, I believe, consistent with an evangelical theology of the poor. Failure to read the New Testament in this way has had the effect of minimizing the historic witness of Jesus' identification with the poor.

Wolfhart Pannenberg has contrasted these two Christological methods as a distinction between a Christology "from above" and a Christology "from below". He writes:

> For Christology that begins "from above," from the divinity of Jesus, the concept of the incarnation stands in the centre. A Christology "from below," rising from the historical man Jesus to the recognition of his divinity, is concerned first of all with Jesus' message and fate and arrives only at the end at the concept of the incarnation (1968:33).

For Pannenberg there are three reasons why a Christology "from above" is not feasible.

First, it presupposes the divinity of Jesus whereas "the most important task of Christology is...to present the reasons for the confession of Jesus' divinity. Instead of presupposing it, we must first inquire about how Jesus' appearance in history led to the recognition of his divinity" (1968:34). This method is helpful to a theology of the poor because of its focus on the history of Jesus of Nazareth. It supports the method recommended by Vinay Samuel, reading from the stances of the historical Jesus and seeing the affirmations of the epistles in the light of these, rather than vice versa. A Christology "from below" implies that Jesus is best understood where the foundations for this understanding are laid in the narratives which interpret his significance, and in the light of which the apostolic formulations are developed. This method serves to protect the historical emphasis from being lost or minimized, as it protects the teachings of the epistles from being seen in isolation from the historical foundation of Jesus Christ.

Second, where Christology takes the divinity of Jesus as its point of departure it "finds its problems only in the union of God and

man in Jesus (and) recognizes only with difficulty the determinative significance inherent in the distinctive features of the real historical man, Jesus of Nazareth" (1968:34). This is, I believe, a very significant point raised by Pannenberg. A Christology "from above", by virtue of its emphasis on Christ's divinity based on trinitarian presuppositions rather than historical reflection, is very easily prey to docetic tendencies. This is a weakness in evangelicalism, for despite its lip service to the humanity of Jesus, in its overall emphasis this aspect of reality is greatly underemphasized and its implications virtually ignored. This is particularly apparent in right wing theological thought. In his critique of fundamentlism, Daniel Stevick writes: "Of several incipient heresies in Fundamentalism, the most noticeable is Docetism - the turning of Jesus' humanity into a mere appearance. Fundamentalist piety and preaching insist so vehemently on the diety (sic) of Jesus Christ that his manhood is made unreal" (1964:63).

Third, a theology "from above" says Pannenberg is not really possible to humans for

> ...one would have to stand in the position of God himself to follow the way of God's Son into the world. As a matter of fact, however, we always think from the context of a historically determined human situation. We can never leap over this limitation. Therefore our starting point must lie in the question about the man Jesus; only in this way can we ask about his divinity (1968:35).

These reflections of Pannenberg are helpful because they support the perspectives of third world evangelical Christologies whose orientation is towards understanding arising primarily from historically determined situations. These perspectives are consistent with a theology of the poor in which a reading "from below" includes a Christology from this vantage point. This is so because inherent in this theology is a vision of Jesus identified not by power and might but by suffering and weakness. In the confession of him as Lord and God there is acknowledgment of his resurrection glory and triumph, but most characteristically this is seen through the lens in which he appears as the suffering servant. This is the

focus arising from contexts of poverty and oppression, the aspect most relevant to such contexts, and the perception apart from which the Lordship of Jesus has little meaning. For Jesus to be Lord he must speak to the least and lowest and be liberator and source of hope in their historical situations. To think otherwise is to engage in irrelevant abstractions.

These Christological reflections, from perspectives sympathetic to a theology of the poor, have validity for radical evangelicals in view of the fact that they reflect the biblical vision of Jesus as Lord because of (not in spite of) his humiliation and suffering (Philippians 2:6-11). In the apocalyptic vision, the one able to open the scroll is referred to as a "Lamb, looking as if it had been slain" (Revelation 5:6). The one seen in faith as the answer to life's deepest mysteries is identified not by power and glory, but by the weakness and suffering of sacrificial death. This emphasis places the experience of suffering at the heart of a theology in which the poor are a central reference point, and in which Jesus is understood in his historical relationship to them.

4.3. A Theology Shaped by Suffering

A radical evangelical theology of the poor, as a formulation from the underside of history, emerges from contexts in which suffering plays a major role in understanding God and the gospel. It can be said to be a theology done at the interface with human suffering. In this it differs from more traditional evangelical formulations where it is the problem of unbelief which is the major question addressed in theology. This statement does not propose that the problem of unbelief is irrelevant, but rather that in a radical perspective its existence relates more particularly to factors related to the human experience of pain than to questions arising from purely rational considerations. Put in another way, the concern of this theology is not only with people as sinners, but also with people as sufferers, the sinned against and alienated. Its

characterisitc concern is to reflect on the human situation from this perspective, a concern largely absent from conservative evangelicalism where the focus is so largely on human unbelief and sin that the factor of suffering plays little or no part in shaping an understanding of God and humankind.

In a Conference on Context and Hermeneutics composed of mainly evangelical participants from North and South America, a major topic discussed was the question "Our Audience: Atheist or Alienated"?12 In a paper on this theme Clark Pinnock presented a traditional evangelical perspective when he focussed on the problems posed by secular humanism as being the major concerns to be addressed by Christians. He said:

> I would like to suggest that the *key determinant* (my emphasis) of the modern situation, an attitude that is affecting enormous numbers of people often catastrophically, is simply godlessness. Humankind is engaged in the pursuit of radical autonomy - freedom from God - and Christians ought to be saying that such a course is doomed (Pinnock 1986:38-39).

In this approach the situation addressed in theology is mainly that of the atheist or unbeliever and the problem most threatening to Christian faith is secular humanism. At issue here is whether the truth question or the justice question should predominate in theological reflection. Pinnock, near the commencement of his paper, wisely indicates that he considers both to be important. In the development of his theme however, the justice question is deemphasized by the way in which he addresses the truth question. He sees the "key determinant" of the modern situation as "godlessness" which he views in relation to systems of unbelief rather than systems of injustice and oppression. The way in which "godlessness" is perceived, in categories dominated by unbelief or injustice, is a key factor in the discussion. In a response to Pinnock at the above mentioned Conference, George Cummings affirms Pinnock's assertion of the importance of both the truth question and the justice question. He, however, criticizes Pinnock's reduction of the

> ...central contradiction in modern life to atheism. I want to challenge this notion as I see it emerging in the paper and to argue that godlessness is a reference point, only in so far as the term *atheism* is demystified of its ideological implications in the American context and reinterpreted as the historicization of idolatry in the values, structures, and sensibilities of modernity. It is within this context that the problem of alienated humanity must be understood and given priority (Cummings 1986:63).

In this exchange between Pinock and Cummings the difference of approach between conservative and radical evangelicalism is exemplified. The radical approach is one in which godlessness and even atheism (as Cummings suggests) are seen not merely in categories of unbelief, as understood in Western formulations, but rather in categories of injustice and human oppression. This emphasis puts the question of human suffering at the centre of theological reflection, whereas the emphasis represented by Pinnock moves it to the periphery.

Chris Sugden, from a slightly different historical perspective, compares the challenge to belief in God by science "one hundred years ago" to the situation today where the great challenge to faith is somewhat different. "The heart-aching contemporary question that challenges the justice and love of God concerns the poverty and dependence of two-thirds of the world's population. Why do one thousand million human beings, created and loved by God, live in extreme degradation"? (1981:1).

The relevant question here concerns a challenge to faith in God. The theology of the poor being developed in this thesis implies that the severest challenges to faith come from the human experience of oppressive suffering rather than unbelief or secular humanism. This in turn implies that the concerns of theology should be orientated toward the experience of suffering rather than unbelief, and therefore in this sense be a theology shaped by suffering, as well as being a theology often emerging from a direct experience of suffering. A radical evangelical theology of the

poor makes a preferential (not exclusive) option for those for whom faith is threatened by the experience of suffering rather than for those threatened by rational theory. Certainly, within a South African context this is, I believe, a far more relevant approach. I see four reasons why our theology should focus on the experience of suffering and should face more towards the alienated than the atheist.

4.3.1. The Reality of Oppressive Suffering

In an essay on "Oppressive Suffering" John de Gruchy has referred to Schillebeeckx's expression, "an excess of suffering". This is "too much *unmerited* and *senseless* suffering for us to be able to give an ethical, hermeneutical and ontological analysis of our disaster" (1987:97). While some forms of suffering may enrich our humanity, an "excess of suffering" so crudely victimizes human beings that "it seems almost obscene to discuss it in an academic manner". There are many, however, who despite the universal pervasiveness of suffering, through the privilege of race and class escape the "excess of senseless and unmerited suffering to which Schillebeeckx refers" (1987:97-98). Others however, and de Gruchy writes specifically of the South African situation, cannot escape and within their social context are victims of

> ...oppressive suffering, that is suffering as a result of the inhumanity and violence of others....Whether we who are white South Africans like it or not, whether we regard it as fair or not, in the annals of history, apartheid will be bracketed with the Holocaust and similar events as twentieth century examples of excessive, unmerited and oppressive suffering (1987:98-99).

When exposure to this kind of suffering of which de Gruchy speaks takes place, whether first hand or by more indirect contact, theological reflection is profoundly affected. This applies not only to reflection on the theme of suffering as such, but to the way in which theology is done. We referred earlier in this chapter to Jim Wallis' observation concerning the powerful preaching and

spirituality emanating from black American churches, "There is something about the experience of suffering which produces this". Similarly, the direct experience of suffering and its central significance in reflection deeply influences the theological process. It has a contextualizing effect, it moves reflection from the abstract to the concrete, it creates an awareness of the gross inappropriateness of purely speculative thinking.

This applies particularly in situations where there is greater awareness of oppressive suffering as a major factor of social reality. Where excessive suffering impinges more directly on the consciousness, theology becomes less abstract and more contextual. This, I believe, is a significant factor in the distinction between third and first world theologies. When we speak of third world theology we immediately think in terms of oppression, for it is a theology from the underside, from a situation which does not permit the luxury of formulations made in isolation from this dominant social reality. Even with a strong awareness that a relationship to God is the key factor for life and understanding, the impact of the social context cannot be diminished, for life's spiritual dimension is inextricably tied to its concrete situations. In my view, theologies in which suffering is not a central determinant, are theologies which in some form are removed from reality, given the fact that oppressive suffering is in varying degrees a world wide phenomenon. Certainly, if in a South African situation theology does not reflect the formative influence of suffering, then this suggests either that it lives in a world of social unawareness and insensitivity, or that it seeks to escape its real context through a dualism which divorces spiritual from social reality. This is, I believe, the overall position of white South African conservative evangelicalism, its theology is characterized both by dualism and by a social awareness in which the suffering caused by oppression is not recognized.13

This question of the influence of oppressive suffering on theological formulation relates directly to the way in which evil is per-

ceived. Where it is seen only in individual terms the tendency is to deny or underestimate the role of oppression in producing suffering and to resort to dualistic models of thought. Consequently theology does not reflect the reality of suffering, at least not as oppressive suffering. But where social aspects of sin and evil are clearly seen, theology moves into the social arena and an analysis which discerns the roots of suffering in oppression becomes a viable option, with the result that suffering then becomes a category which is a major determinant of theology. At issue is the way in which sin is understood and the recognition of its social forms. A view which acknowledges its effects in the social sphere is consistent with the biblical emphasis that sin is not only an offence against God but also against fellow human beings, which leads to the perception that sin's seriousness lies in the harm it does to people.

> Sin is an offence against God precisely because it is an offence against people: "Whatever you do to the least of these people, you do to me" (Mt 25:40,45). There is no such thing as a sin that does not harm anyone....Sin is about suffering, about making people suffer, allowing them to suffer or ignoring their sufferings....Sin becomes visible in suffering. The seriousness or gravity of a sin must be measured in terms of the amount of pain and suffering it causes (Nolan 1988:38).

These words of Nolan are in harmony with the emphasis of Jesus where he opposed the Jewish rulers for their oppression of people with a religion concerned more with legal details than with human welfare and suffering (Mark 4:23-27).

In the evangelical community this question of the way in which evil is perceived is of fundamental importance. If sin is defined in only individual and legalistic ways and its social impact in terms of human suffering is ignored, then the resultant theology will have little or no relevance in the context of the pain suffered by the poor and the hope they cherish for relief. From this perspective the shaping of theology by the reality of human suffering is of crucial importance.

4.3.2. The Inadequacy of Rational Theory in Coping with the Question of Suffering

A second reason why a theology of the poor should focus on the needs of the alienated rather than the atheist, lies in the incapacity of rational theories to solve the problems raised by suffering. We have already noted the statement of Schillebeeckx concerning an excess of suffering in which explanations and interpretations do not avail. The whole debate concerning the theodicy and the grappling with the question of how we can see God as both almighty and all-loving in a world wracked with pain, only serves to accentuate the limitations of the rational process and the its inadequacy as a means of help in human suffering. This does not mean that rational discourse must therefore be dismissed as totally irrelevant, rather it points to its limitation especially where it is related to the question of suffering, and implies an approach more concerned with the liberation and relief of those who suffer than with explanation and the justification of God.

De Gruchy refers to the protest of the bible "against any theodicy based on rational theory" and, underlining the unanswerable nature of the questions raised by suffering, suggests that

> ...the most satisfying attempts to grapple with the reality of suffering have been those of dramatists, poets and novelists....Without denying the importance of rational discussion of the problem, I suggest that theological reflection on human suffering has more in common with the passionate explorations of the poets and dramatists than it has with the often dispassionate debates of the philosophers (1987:102-104).

I find these comments of de Gruchy helpful because they point in a direction which is both realistic and holds more hopeful potential for those who suffer, for as we shall see, this perspective leads to a vision of God which accentuates his compassionate identification with suffering people. It challenges those evangelical views of God which hold so tenaciously to the principle of divine

sovereignty that they are prepared to attempt its rational defence at any price, even if this means projecting an image of God which effectively denies his compassion for those who suffer.

4.3.3. The Vision of a Suffering God

In my view a most compelling argument for orientating theology towards the concerns of suffering people lies in the fact that this procedure most naturally relates to that vision of God in which his suffering and pain are accentuated. This approach is consistent with a theology of the poor for it highlights that aspect of the divine nature which most readily appeals to and assists those who suffer as victims of oppression.

At the heart of this consideration lies the assertion that the kind of atheism which carries most weight in our world is what de Gruchy calls a "protest atheism" (1987:109), one which cries out in pain at the absence of God when he is most sorely needed, and is disillusioned by an experience of life which suggests that there is no God who cares. This is epitomized in

> ...the weary cry of Maria Zotwana, an elderly Mfengu woman dumped in the Ciskei.
>
> "We had no choice" she said, "the guns were behind us, then they bring us to this sad place. Here there is not enough food. I am hungry now, as I am sitting here. Everybody has died. My man has gone and died as have my daughters. They took my land away. The Lord has also gone, yes, I suppose he has also gone" (de Gruchy 1987:106).

I submit that in the South African situation, where the kind of "forced removal" alluded to by Maria Zotwana has by no means been uncommon,14 *the* challenge to Christian faith is that which comes from the experience of suffering and oppression rather than the arguments of secular humanists. "Atheism", according to Dorothy Soelle, "arises out of human suffering" (de Gruchy 1987:115).

The most significant question about God in this context is not "the question of God's existence but God's essence. As both Jungel and Moltmann show, the alternative to the atheist protest against a God who permits innocent, oppressive suffering is not a theism which tries to defend the defenceless, but a trinitarian understanding of God who is a participant in our suffering" (de Gruchy 1987:115-116). Here the biblical words "In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them" (Isaiah 63:9), give us a clue as to the kind of God who gives hope to the sufferers. In this aspect of God's passionate identification with those in pain we find a divine perspective most relevant to the situation of oppressed people. In a moving passage on the suffering of God, Bonhoeffer writes:

> God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us. Matt. 8:17 makes it quite clear that Christ helps us, not by virtue of his omnipotence, but by virtue of his weakness and suffering. Here is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions. Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world: God is the *deus ex machina*. The Bible directs man to God's powerlessness and suffering; only a suffering God can help (de Gruchy 1987:117).

4.3.4. The Effects of Christian Legitimation of Oppression

This fourth argument supporting a theology directed to the concerns of suffering people follows naturally from the point just made that the greatest challenge to Christian faith arises from experiences of oppressive suffering. Here we face the ultimate irony, that the followers of the Christ who always opted to stand with the victims, too often have opted to stand with the oppressors and have themselves frequently become the instruments of oppression. De Gruchy has written: "such suffering sanctioned by Christians and the church in the name of God have (sic) eroded faith in God as much as, if not more than, the intellectual difficulty of reconciling human pain with God Almighty and God all-loving" (1987:105). In an-

other passage de Gruchy says that the "ultimate failure of the...Christian church, is when it becomes the cause of such suffering instead of the suffering servant which mediates the redemptive love of God" (1987:119).

I suggest that part of the reason for this greatest of all scandals lies in the tendency for theology to avoid the situation of the sufferer in favour of that of the unbeliever. Here again an unbiblical dualism plays its part, for in its zeal for the conversion of "souls" the evangelical church has developed a theology which has neglected the plight of suffering people. In its concern for their welfare in the hereafter it has lost sight of their welfare here and now. The result has been a social apathy which has easily led to support of oppressive regimes in the belief that the prime freedom is the church's freedom to preach its gospel of personal salvation. By its focus on the needs of the unbelieving sinner, the evangelical church has allowed the needs of the sinned-against sufferer to be neglected, and losing sight of this has lost its bearings socially and taken the wrong option for the oppressor against the oppressed. Although there are exceptions to this, and signs of awakening to these concerns, this overall analysis still remains true, certainly within a South African context. It is this factor which led to the production of the EWISA document in which the crisis of faith of black evangelicals in the townships is reflected in the following words:

> This crisis of faith is caused by the contradictions they have to live with on a daily basis as they try to live in this crisis situation. This crisis of faith is caused by the dilemma of being oppressed and exploited by people who claim to be Christians, especially those who claim to be "born again". It is a dilemma of being detained by these people, tortured and even killed by them in the name of "Law and Order" or in the name of combating "communism" (1986:13).

At stake here is the credibility of the church and its message. In a South African setting a church which does not side with the suffering poor and speak a word which gives them hope, is a church which has forfeited all credibility as representatives of a Lord

whose stance was clearly in favour of the oppressed poor. De Gruchy has written: "The credibility of the church's testimony today is bound up not so much with its intellectual ability to defend the faith,...but far more with the willingness of the church to participate in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of the world" (1987:123).

These considerations point us clearly to an approach in which the concerns of the suffering poor must be our prime point of departure. If our theology is to be truly Christian, a reflection of the commitment of Jesus who came as the suffering servant and identified decisively with the poor of his day, then it must be a theology of the poor, an understanding of faith in which the oppressed poor play a determinative role.

5. A Theology of the Poor: Concluding Statement

At the commencement of this reflection on a theology of the poor I made an initial statement based on the previous chapter. The stage has now been reached for a further statement, based on the considerations of this major section. While this is a concluding statement, gathering together and assessing these formulations in a final few paragraphs, I do not regard it as being the "last word" on the matter. It merely represents part of an on-going process which seeks to enunciate the growing vision of God and his kingdom which is developing among radical evangelicals, and here is formulated in terms of my own understanding.

There are two main features of a theology of the poor; a preferential option for the poor and a theological formulation from the underside. These two factors summarize the essence of what has been said. Expanding this however, this theology can be represented in the following seven ways.

5.1. A Theology in a Servant Form

This is an emphasis to which much attention has been given. Essentially, a theology of the poor by its emphasis on being "from the underside" speaks from the perspective of a servant rather than a master. This is reflected by its rejection of hierachical models of thought, by its emphasis on a message from the periphery, and especially by its focus on the incarnation. It is incarnational in its vision of the identification of Jesus with the poor of his time as determinative for the way in which theology should be done. Thus, while it does not deny the concept of divine sovereignty, it interprets this in the light of servanthood and understands the significance of Christ the king in his character as servant-king.

The ultimate question for any theology is: What kind of God does it portray? In this theology God is seen in historically concrete terms which accentuate his involvement in life and highlight his compassion for those who suffer and his action on their behalf. It may be said to be a "participatory" theological model emphasizing God's compassion and suffering. It contrasts with the more usual evangelical model which emphasizes God's power and sovereignty. This may be called a "magisterial" model for it focuses on God's authority and control over the human situation. In contrasting these two models I am not suggesting that we must opt for the one to the exclusion of the other, for if we seek to follow a biblical vision we must affirm both the love and power of God. Neither do I suggest that God's love and power should be seen as incompatible and either the power of love or the loving exercise of power ignored.15 What I do suggest is that historical contexts create a need for sustaining faith in God in which the repetition of ontological categories is insufficient. When faith is threatened in contexts where large scale Christian involvement in oppression is experienced then the "magisterial" model has little credibility as a means of Christian apologetic. The context of oppression calls for a "participatory" model for it reflects a need for assurance that God is not to be confused with the authority figures

of society, but rather is seen in his compassionate identification with the cause of those who suffer unjustly. The theology being formulated in this thesis reflects a South African socio-religious situation which, I believe, calls for a "participatory" model as the primary vehicle for an understanding of God. Opting for this perspective is a contextual necessity if credible faith in God is to be sustained among the majority who suffer the effects of apartheid in "Christian" South Africa. Emphasizing Christian implication in this system, Martin Prozesky has redefined apartheid in the following terms: "*apartheid is a legalised injustice which whites who identify strongly with Christianity have imposed by force on blacks in South Africa, the majority of whom are their fellow Christians*" (1990:127).

5.2. An Alternative Theology

As a radical evangelical theology of the poor this theology is in tension with that of the mainline evangelical community. This factor has been reflected repeatedly in our considerations. We have viewed this theology *vis-a-vis* conservative evangelical theology and noted significant areas of distinction. This formulation attempts to come to terms with some of the perceived inadequacies within the dominant tradition, it proposes an alternative designed both to reflect neglected biblical and historical emphases and seeks to empower evangelicals to cope with their social context. At the heart of the distinction between conservative and radical evangelical theologies lies the fact that they reflect the contrasts between Western thinking and that of the third world.

5.3. A Prophetic Theology

The prophetic nature of this theology of the poor is shown in its endeavour to share its vision and confront its own situation. It shows an evangelistic desire in the way it addresses its parent community, the mainline evangelical body from which it has emerged. This is evident particularly in the writings of Orlando Costas and Jim Wallis, as in the EWISA document, through which a clear call to conversion sounds. This prophetic theology has a strong emphasis on the kingdom of God and it calls the evangelical church to discover its true mission as a servant of this kingdom. Costas writes:

> It seems to me that only a prophetically critical and evangelically radical contextual evangelistic approach can do justice to the cutting edge of the gospel, which is its transforming and liberating message for the poor, the dispossessed and the oppressed. For this reason, its demand of conversion to the cause of the kingdom makes necessary a social base on the periphery of every historical situation (1989:169).

5.4. A Biblical Theology

This radical evangelical theology of the poor displays its evangelical quality in its steadfast reference to and attempted adherence to biblical norms. Though not biblical in the formal sense of primarily seeking an exposition of selected themes in sections of scripture, nor in a traditional evangelical sense of seeking to defend a view of scripture, in a material sense it is most thoroughly biblical. Its primary biblical concern is to reflect and obey that pattern of faith and life which it sees in scripture. In this its major motivation relates to discipleship formation and action rather than apologetic defence. Its concern is more with obedience to the biblical model than with a formal doctrine of inspiration. It is motivated more to discover neglected biblical emphases concerning the poor and apply these in socially oppressive situations than to elaborate systems of biblical doctrine, some of

whose relevance to concrete historical situations is very questionable.

5.5. A Theology of Faith Active in the World

A theology of the poor shows a social and political character through its commitment to the cause of the poor in society. It is not an abstract theology. Its prime concern is not speculative formulation, but empowerment for participation in God's liberating activity in the world. It is an ethical theology, for it combines understanding with action, God's revealed nature with his kingdom demand. Orlando Costas gives a good example of this kind of theology in an Anabaptist combination of the gospel and ethics contained in a hymn of Menno Simons:

> True evangelical faith cannot lie sleeping
> for it clothes the naked,
> it comforts the sorrowful;
> it gives to the hungry food,
> and it shelters the destitute.
> It cares for the blind and lame
> the widow and orphan child;
> that's true evangelical faith.
> It binds up the wounded man;
> it offers a gentle hand.
> We must become ev'rything to everyone.
> Abundantly we have received
> and gratefully we will respond
> with true evangelical faith.
> So overcome evil with good;
> return someone's hatred with love.
> We must become ev'rything to everyone (1989:157).

Something of this same accent on a theology active in the world comes through in a report of an Asian theological workshop: "We believe that theology is not detached, cool, objective, or neutral. Theology is passionately involved. It begins with the experience of the actual struggles, suffering and joys of particular communities" (Boesak 1977:12).

5.6. A Humanitarian Theology

In its focus on the poor this theology displays a humanitarian concern. It affirms and emphasizes human dignity. While perceiving the evil and sin present in the world and in people it does not allow this to obscure its vision of the value and worth of human persons. In this view of human dignity its primary concern is to affirm the dignity of those whose humanity has been demeaned by oppressive human systems. Costas quotes Elizondo's saying: "God chooses an oppressed people not to bring them comfort in their oppression, but to enable them to confront, transcend, and transform whatever in the oppressor society diminishes and destroys the fundamental dignity of human nature" (1989:167). But in its vision of uplifting the depressed poor, this theology also sees this as leading towards a broader affirmation of the dignity of all, particularly in its quest for the liberation of those oppressors whose actions have dehumanized them. In these terms, a theology of the poor may be said to have humanization as one of its primary goals.

5.7. A Contextual Theology

In this theology of the poor considerable attention has been given to the importance of historically concrete situations which affect theological understanding and formulation. There has been a conscious attempt to avoid the abstraction and generality which can so easily invade evangelical theological discourse.

Orlando Costas well expresses this contextual perspective in his words:

> The God of the Incarnation is not a supracultural, supratemporal, and supraspatial deity with a universal language and a "homogeneous mass" as interlocutor. Rather, the God of the Incarnation is the God who chose in sovereign freedom not only to be contextualized in the history and sociocultural reality of a first-century Galilean Jew but also to become available, through the transmission of the gospel in the power of the Holy

> Spirit, to every person and community in their concrete reality (1989:25).

In the contextual emphasis of this thesis this historically specific character of the gospel is being emphasized. Its effect is not to restrict the message of hope to one particular context (the poor), but rather from this base to make it universally available for all situations. In this approach Christians are empowered to face the social challenge of a divided and oppressive society like South Africa with a biblically based, contextually relevant theology which has the potential to equip people to cope with their situation. This theology is a preferential option for the poor expressed in a understanding which interprets meaning from the underside of history.

NOTES

1 These words are being written in May 1990 following the historic meeting between delegations from the African National Congress and the South African government.

2 This broad usage of the term "theology" makes it inclusive of ethics for instance. I do not see ethics as an outcome or application of theology but rather as intrinsic to it, that is the discussion of how faith is expressed in terms of moral behaviour. My sympathies lie with Menno Simons of whom McClendon wrote that "in his *Foundation of Christian Doctrine* (he has) so interwoven ethics and doctrine that the seam between the two cannot be found" (1986:44).

3 The Conference of Latin American Catholic Bishops held at Puebla, Mexico, in 1979.

4 In the earlier definition of the "poor" we noted that the concept would be used in two ways in this thesis. First, as a people-group to whom special attention is given and second as a category of theological understanding. In the formulation that has been used "the poor" are seen in terms of the first of these understandings. This is an incomplete perspective to which the second complementary aspect will be added in a coming section. The "special consideration" mentioned is not intended to imply paternalism or to deny the need for the empowerment of the poor.

5 Compare this with Morphew's view of the South African situation as comprising a complex of struggles; race, tribal, colonial/decolonial, First World/Third World, class, ideological, and religious (1989:193). In mentioning these he refuses to opt for one specific analysis as characteristic of the overall situation and thus represents a non-committed approach in social analysis with a

major emphasis on spiritual conflict.

6 I have not mentioned ethics in this formulation simply because I see the ethical dimension as present in all of theology, especially in a theology of the poor, and prefer not to treat it as a separate entity in this discussion. Particularly in my concept of mission I see an intrinsic incorporation of ethical factors in a view of the gospel as good news of the kingdom of God. Thus while the term "ethics" is not common in the thesis the threefold theological approach incorporates it as an implicit ingredient of the whole. The theology of the poor developing here is in essence an ethical statement. I agree with Johann Kinghorn when in speaking of the struggle within the South African church he said that "this struggle takes place in terms of social ethics, and not, at least not overtly, in terms of abstract doctrinal debate" (1988:12).

7 This concept of moving from the particular to the universal does not deny the presence of a universal emphasis in the Old Testament or in the synoptics. Rather its concern is to focus on the concretely particular nature of "the beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ" (Mark 1:1) and to preserve this as a basic ingredient in the definition of the gospel.

8 From an address by Caesar Molebatsi presented at a Fellowship Of Concerned Baptists Workshop, Pretoria 3 March 1990.

9 This idea is based on an interpretation of Romans 13:1-7 which asserts that God has ordained human government in such a way that to resist it is to resist God. This view ignores factors both within (verses three, four and six), and outside of (c.f. Revelation 13:1-8 picturing the totalitarian state as servant of Satan), the immediate context which qualify the idea of submission to human authority

10 This of course does not deny a truly evangelical view of God's control of history in the sense of accomplishing his purposes through human agencies whether great or small, but rather focuses on a *preferential* option God takes for the weak and poor.

11 The synopsis of a paper by Rene Padilla on "Christology and Mission in the Two Third World" reads: "The images of Jesus Christ imported from the West into the Two Thirds World are inadequate for the life and mission of the church in situations of poverty and injustice. A search has begun for a Christology which will provide a basis for Christian action in contemporary society" (1984:12).

12 Held at Tlayacapan, Mexico, November 24-29, 1983, and sponsored by the Theological Students Fellowship and the Latin American Theological Fraternity.

13 This is, of course, connected to a social analysis and biblical interpretation in which oppression is not seen as the major cause of poverty and its resultant suffering.

14 3,5 million people, mostly black, were forcibly "resettled" under government policy between 1960 and 1983 (Wilson and Ramphele 1989:216).

15 Edward LeRoy Long Jr. in his *A Survey of Christian Ethics*

refers to the way in which Tillich criticizes ontological contrasts between love and power and quotes him as saying:

> Love and power are often contrasted in such a way that love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love. Powerless love and loveless power are contrasted. This, of course, is unavoidable if love is understood from its emotional side and power from its compulsory side. But such an understanding is error and confusion (1967:57-58).

Long continues; "Tillich's ontological definition of love involves the idea that love is the power of unity which seeks to overcome separation and estrangement. Love, therefore, is itself a power seeking to reunite that which has been estranged by separation" (1967:58). This view which sees love and power in their broadest perspectives as more than either emotion or compulsion is, I believe, valid when their essential nature is being discussed.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONTEXTUALIZATION: A CHALLENGE TO EVANGELICAL METHODOLOGY

The argument of this thesis has thus far focussed on radical evangelical concepts concerning the poor. Structurally we have passed through two major stages. First, in chapters one and two, foundations have been laid in the definitions of radical evangelicalism and the poor. Second, in chapters three and four developments from these foundations have taken place in the survey of radical perspectives on the poor and in the theology which has been articulated. We now enter our third and final major section. In this section we will address the question: What difference does this radical evangelical theology of the poor make to evangelical understanding and action? In drawing conclusions from the previous foundations and developments we will focus on ways in which a theology of the poor challenges traditional evangelical formulations and practices.

The challenge which is to be considered in this concluding section has already become apparent in the arguments that have been advanced. The deliberate emphasis throughout has been on this theology vis-a-vis various forms of conservative evangelical understanding. In this emphasis a theology of the poor has been seen as an alternative formulation to these other evangelical perceptions which are, in this thesis, deemed inadequate particularly in third world contexts.

Some of the already mentioned challenges to the dominant evangelical tradition may be tabulated as follows:

(1) Conservative tendencies to spiritualize poverty are challenged by the radical perspectives.

(2) Individualism, seen both in its ignoring of social causes and remedies for poverty and in its divorce of personal from communal concerns, is challenged by this theology.

(3) This theology also strongly challenges the way in which the mainline community has neglected the biblical emphasis on the poor.

(4) A dualism which makes a separation between spiritual and social concerns and neglects the latter by its preoccupation with the former also finds a clear challenge in the holistic emphasis which is an integral part of a theology of the poor.

(5) This challenge also relates to the understanding of gospel where solely spiritual and personal perceptions are faced by radical formulations in which the situation of the poor influences the way in which the gospel is interpreted.

(6) Social attitudes which favour the rich over against the poor and issue in the support of oppressive regimes of power find an insistent challenge in this theology.

(7) Economic views which focus more on the right to possess than the responsibility to share and consequently uncritically endorse exploitative economic systems, are also challenged by this theology's emphasis on favouring the poor.

(8) This theology of the poor challenges the ways in which the evangelical tradition of social concern and involvement has been largely neglected by modern evangelicals and the ways in which, where it has been recognized, social attitudes towards pressing issues have remained ambivalent and uncommitted.

(9) Those emphases which call for political neutrality, even in contexts of oppression, and by so doing provide legitimation to the status quo are challenged by this theology which sees the situation of the poor as demanding a preferential option on their behalf.

(10) Those forms of theology which reflect a hierarchical understanding expressed in "top down" models of thought are clearly challenged by the perception of a theology "from the underside" developed in this thesis.

(11) This theology of the poor also provides a challenge to those views of God in which the mainline tradition so emphasizes "magisterial" models of understanding that "participatory" models are largely ignored and God is easily seen as favouring the cause of the powerful elite in society.

(12) Finally, the challenge of this theology may be expressed as a challenge to the ways in which traditional evangelicalism has ignored contextual realities and has often claimed divine sanction for formulations which have in fact been contextually determined.

A radical evangelical theology of the poor in this thesis is described as challenging traditional evangelical theology. The word "challenge" is used in the sense of a call to respond to these developing insights by re-examining the bases of the formulations of the dominant tradition. While this challenge obviously applies to the mainline community itself and argues for an alternative interpretation in certain key areas, it does, I believe, have a more pertinent reference. It is above all a challenge to the radical community itself to shake off the shackles of theological perspectives which too often have been oppressive in their effects on those who have held them.

This challenge is said to refer to aspects of evangelical theology. This indicates that it is not a repudiation of evangelical theology as such, but a questioning of certain parts of it which represent traditions of interpretation unconnected to the essence of what it means to be evangelical. The use of the term "aspects" also indicates that I have selected specific areas of concern for attention. The tabulation listed above, which itself is only a brief represen-

tation of some of the challenges that have surfaced in the preceding discussions, indicates a broad spectrum of issues which could be addressed. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to attempt a treatment of all these. I have chosen rather to focus on two crucial areas in which a theology of the poor challenges the dominant tradition. In the first of these, the area of method, consideration is given to the ways in which we know and the question of biblical hermeneutics. Here it is the contextual nature of a theology of the poor which constitutes its challenge to mainline evangelicalism. The second concerns missiological perspectives in evangelicalism. A theology of the poor by its holistic character challenges certain key aspects of conservative evangelicalism's mission perspective. Here I have chosen to focus specially on the individualism and dualism which are too often seen in it.

The role of context in the development of an evangelical commitment to the poor following the 1974 Lausanne Congress has already been noted. Growing awareness of the way theology is influenced by context led to an awakening to the significance of the poor. It was from third world situations close to the realities of poverty and oppression that awareness of the importance of context mainly emerged. Thus the situation of the poor and increased awareness of the importance of epistemology in the theological process interacted with one another to move the context of the poor to centre stage in radical evangelical thought.

The discussions in the "survey" chapter have clearly indicated that the radical emphasis on the poor is inextricably tied to the question of context. This has also been clearly indicated in discussions of the identity of the poor and the formulation of a theology of the poor. So we may say that biblical emphasis, historical example, social analysis, and theological formulation all point to the contextual nature of this developing understanding of the poor. It is, however, particularly in the theological development that this understanding of the poor has been shown to be integrally contextual. The emphasis on the importance of historical concrete

situations, on the incarnation and reading from positions on the underside of history, on the effects of suffering on perception are all thoroughly contextual ways of formulating truth. Therefore the challenge presented to the mainline evangelical community at this point is a challenge from a contextual position addressed to a position seen to have a fundamental lack in this regard.

1. Knowledge within a Context

In his essay on "The Contextualization of the Gospel" Rene Padilla refers to the common approach to bible reading which assumes that revelation consists basically of doctrinal statements readily translatable from the original biblical languages. The existence of the translated bible provides knowledge that is seen to be "basically rational and that...is communicated directly from the mind of God to the human mind" (1985:85). The fallacy of this view quickly becomes apparent when the historical nature of scripture and the revelatory process is considered. "The raw material of theology" says Padilla, "is not abstract concepts but rather a message concerning historical events the narration and interpretation of which are colored by the Semitic and Greco-Roman cultures in which the biblical authors lived" (1985:85).

However, it is not only the historical context of the biblical text itself which calls for attention, this knowledge is received within a context and thus the situation of the interpreter also influences understanding.

Anthony C. Thiselton in his volume *The Two Horizons* speaks of the historical context of the biblical text and that of the modern interpreter as elements which both play a significant role in modern hermeneutics. He says:

> Traditionally hermeneutics entailed the formulation of rules for the understanding of an ancient text, especially in linguistic and historical terms. The interpreter was urged to begin with the language of the text, including its grammar, vocabulary, and style. He examined its

> linguistic, literary, and historical context. In other words, traditional hermeneutics began with the recognition that a text was conditioned by a given historical context. However, hermeneutics in the more recent sense of the term begins with the recognition that historical conditioning is two-sided: *the modern interpreter, no less than the text, stands in a given historical context and tradition.* (1980:11).

The recognition of these two horizons which affect all interpretation emphasizes the fact that "human thinking and speaking can never be a-contextual" (Nicol 1986:77). No interpreter lives within a vacuum, the Word of God comes to people in terms of their own culture or it does not come to them at all (Padilla 1985:87). Padilla quotes James D. Smart:

> No man has direct access to the content of Scripture either by the perfection of his scholarship or the power of his inspiration. Every apprehension of the text and every statement of its meaning is an interpretation and, however adequately it expresses the content of the text, it dare not ever be equated with the text itself (1985:87).

This, according to Padilla, means that there can be no such thing as absolute objectivity. "The interpreter is always present in his interpretation, present as a fallible being" (1985:88). Thus it is necessary to note that knowledge is always perceived, formulated and communicated in a context. It seems to be undeniably the case that this contextual influence or conditioning is part of our human existence and an element of the process of "knowing".

Edward Schillebeeckx has spoken of this contextual necessity in the following terms:

> ...the person who claims to read old documents in a "neutral" way cannot think away his own present; he is wrong if he thinks he can. In that case he is simply not aware of his own hidden interests. Whether consciously or unconsciously, people look at historical documents in the light of present day questions, suppositions and hypotheses (1981:100).

Speaking of the growing awareness of the importance of context in the church, Orlando Costas refers to the fact that those trying to

be consciously contextual in their theology have "begun to rediscover the true nature of theology, namely, reflecting on the faith in the light of one's historical context" (1982:3). It is important to note that contextualization is anything but a new theological fad. It is rather an awakening to a reality present all the time which too often has been ignored or overlooked. Speaking of this reality and its pervasive influence, Costas has said:

> There is no such thing as timeless or nonspatially related knowledge, since knowledge is a fundamental part of life, which is, in turn, a complex, inter-related phenomenon. The Spanish philosopher Jose Ortega y Gasset used to say, "I am me and my circumstances". In other words, I do not exist outside my circumstances. Neither do I know outside historical reality. Everything that I am, everything that I know is intrinsically bound to everything that I do. Because knowledge is contextual, it is also practical. It is human sensorial activity, shaped by reality and geared towards its transformation (1982:4).

An excellent example of the way in which context shapes thinking is given by James Cone when he introduces his *God of the Oppressed* with reference to his upbringing in the black Church at Macedonia African Methodist Episcopal Church, Beardon, Arkansas. Referring to the singing of the hymn "Amazing Grace" he writes:

> When Sister Ora Wallace raised her melodious voice and filled Macedonia with its rich and resonant tones, the entire congregation joined with her, because "Amazing Grace" spoke to their condition.
>
> Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
> That saved a wretch like me!
> I once was lost, but now am found,
> Was blind, but now I see.
>
> Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
> I have already come;
> 'Tis grace hath bro't me safe thus far,
> And grace will lead me home.
>
> Ironically, this song was written by an ex-slave trader; but when the sons and daughters of black slaves sang it, "Amazing Grace" was infused with black power and meaning. For blacks in Beardon, the "dangers, toils, and snares" referred to their daily struggle to survive the ups and downs of black existence, and the attempt to seize a measure of freedom in an extreme situation of oppression.

> "Amazing Grace" was the miracle of survival, because it is difficult to explain how we made it through slavery, Reconstruction, and the struggle against oppression in the twentieth century. Blacks in Beardon said: "It must have been the grace of God!"
>
> Because I have lived the Beardon experience, I cannot separate it from my theological perspective. I am a *black* theologian! I therefore must approach the subject of theology in the light of the black church and what it means in a society dominated by white people (1975:4-5).

2. Challenge to Cultural Captivity

The fact that knowledge is gained in a context also relates to the kind of influence culture exerts on the church, which in its more extreme forms involves cultural captivity. At issue is the way in which the conservative evangelical community ignores the influence of its context in shaping its theology and the resulting bondage to time and space-bound formulations confused with eternal and universal expressions of divine truth. At this point the contextuality of radical evangelicals expressly shown in a theology of the poor challenges this a-contextual and culturally conditioned way of thinking.

Costas in writing of the American church in crisis says:

> The cultural boundness of the church and the ideological captivity of its theology are one aspect of this crisis. Michaelson is right in stating that "the distinct problem with mission in America is that the Christian church finds itself deeply identified already with the dominant but disintegrating culture" of the United States. One need not go far to see this uncritical acculturation to the "American way of life". From the corporation-type pattern of church organization to the types of ministerial training, worship, and evangelization, patterns of administration and lifestyles, the majority of American churches reveal an uncritical commitment to their sociocultural milieu (1982:78).

It is often the case that where evangelicals dogmatically claim to teach only the pure Word of God they are completely unaware of the

influence of their culture on their interpretation. Evangelical scholar Harvie Conn has bemoaned this "Evangelical failure of awareness of our cultural boundness" (Johnston 1985:6). Another evangelical scholar Douglas W. Frank has written of this in his book *Less Than Conquerors*. He examines the evangelical-fundamentalist heritage of the modern movement and its nature at the beginning of the twentieth century.

> ...the theology that evolved during those years has helped define evangelicalism throughout the twentieth century, continuing to do so as that century draws to its close.1 It has helped define me, my closest friends, and family, the churches of which I have been a part, the colleges I have been associated with as student and teacher, and the books I have read. It has fashioned the lenses through which, until very recently, I read the Bible, lenses on the whole more powerful because I did not know I wore them (1986:viii).

An interesting aspect of this "cultural blindness" is the fact that often those who most strongly affirm objectivity are most clearly subjective. An example of this is evangelicals who deny being influenced by tradition and oppose any emphasis on it. F. F. Bruce has written of this:

> What interests me specially is the part played by tradition in the life and thought of people who in theory and profession repudiate the authority of tradition, appealing from the tradition of others to the Bible alone.... such Christians ...have no recognized "subordinate standards"....to provide guidelines for the interpretation and application of Scripture. Where subordinate standards are not recognized, it does not follow that there are no such guidelines...(which) take the form of unwritten tradition....Indeed, in some more enclosed traditions the authority of Scripture will be identified with the authority of the accepted tradition, because it has never occurred to those inside the enclosure that Scripture could be interpreted or applied otherwise.
>
> Of an "Irish clergyman" (actually John Nelson Darby) under whose powerful influence he came at a formative period of his youth, Francis William Newman says: "he only wanted men `to submit their understanding *to God*', that is, to the Bible, that is, to his interpretation!" The history of the spiritual successors of the "Irish clergyman" provides an adequate commentary on the consequences of such submission (1970:13-14).

This unrecognized way in which tradition and culture shapes thinking is a factor in the call for a-politicism in theology and mission by many conservative evangelicals. This is a call in which a strong appeal to abide by biblical principles obscures the hidden influences and agendas which affect the ways in which such evangelicals think. According to Vinay Samuel:

> Third World Christians are increasingly asking...why formulations of Christian faith produced in the West for years have insisted that Jesus had no social or political stance or goals. Why have western interpreters been blind to the material on God and the poor in the scriptures? Who has benefited from such views (Sugden 1988:383)?

In a previous chapter we noted the contribution of Thomas Hanks to the study of the Old Testament vocabulary for oppression in which he clearly demonstrates the degree to which this theme is a major category of biblical thought. A reading of the work of this evangelical Old Testament scholar with its painstaking and extensive lexical research prompts the question: Why has evangelical scholarship with all its emphasis on biblical research failed to recognize the fundamental character of these biblical categories of oppression and poverty? This same question is raised by Ron Sider when he asks why evangelicals have insisted on the centrality of faith in the resurrection on biblical grounds but largely neglected the equally prominent emphasis that God is on the side of the poor (Costas 1979:x-xi)?

Maybe part of the answer to the above question lies in the fact that Thomas Hanks is located in San Jose, Costa Rica, a context in which the Latin American realities of poverty and oppression are not easily hidden; a context in which theological categories, even among evangelicals, are no longer solely being determined by imported Western formulations. A clue to the answer lies in the words of Hanks himself:

> The time has come when we must ask whether the politico-theologico-religious upheaval in Latin America is not of greater significance for the proper understanding and use

> of the Bible than is the Reformation itself. The Reformation, taking advantage of the scientific linguistic gains of the Renaissance and the technological breakthrough of the printing press taught the churches to read the Bible from the perspective of the middle class....In Latin America the *communidades de base* and their theologies of liberation are forcing us to undertake a new kind of exegesis that is more authentically historical: to read the Bible from the perspective of the oppressed-poor, which of course was the historical and socio-economic context of the people of God (with very few exceptions) throughout Bible history (1983:61-62).

The Protestant Reformation with its emphasis on biblical authority and justification by faith is an undoubted evangelical heritage which cannot be denied and has immense value for theological understanding. But Western patterns of thought tied to this heritage often create a barrier for third world evangelicals in their endeavour to understand the meaning of faith in contexts vastly different to those in which these formulations arose. The a-contextualism and a-politicism associated with the way in which much of the Reformation heritage has been communicated has had a decidedly negative effect in third world contexts. It has substituted imposed Western formulations for a theology which rightly should emerge from grass roots level and as such reflect a biblical perspective from the underside.

The effects of such Westernized evangelical theology was reflected on at a recent National Awareness Workshop of the Baptist Convention of South Africa.2 A strong emphasis was placed on the ways in which Western forms of thinking reflected in education for black pastors at the Baptist Bible Institute, Fort White, had created an inability to cope with the realities of the black situation in South Africa. This according to one speaker reflected a "mechanism of dominance" shown in "the control of white Baptists over the nature and content of ...theological education". This education was

> ...both Euro-centred and privatised. This means that the questions, subject matter, books and lectures were predominantly based on European and North American theology. The significance of the rise of African, Black and Liberation Theologies did not form part of the course. Social ethics, especially issues directly related to the

> South African context, again received little or no emphasis (Kretzschmar 1990:30).

Convention General Secretary Fanyana P. Mhlophe said concerning the emphasis in the training offered: "The curriculum was foreign in all aspects...(and) became an insult to our dignity and humaness (sic)". In calling for theological education "suited to the African situation" in which "Africans can be empowered in their own context", Mhlophe went on to say:

> I need to distinguish that which is Biblical from the western cultural baggage in which it is wrapped. There is a growing spirit of national awareness and consciousness which is accompanied by an increasingly critical stance towards the West and all it stands for. The West can no longer act as if it is the only leader of world thinking (1990:54,55,57).

This dissatisfaction with the a-contextualism of the education offered in the white controlled situation was expressed by another speaker. When referring to the Kairos Document he said that in many cases deacons in the black Baptist churches knew more about it than the pastors did (Madolo 1990:60).

These comments signify an awakening to the ways in which Western theological formulations have been used to stifle the development of a truly contextual theology. In the process black evangelicals exposed to these forms of training have been alienated from their contexts and indoctrinated with Western formulations which have made them incapable of bearing prophetic witness to Christ in South African black society. The cultural captivity of Western evangelicalism has been imposed on third world contexts with unfortunate results. This captivity is bad enough when expressed in the a-politicism of Western evangelical theology. It is even more damaging when exported into third world contexts for it denies to evangelicals in these situations the support and empowerment derived from that vision in which God is seen to identify with the poor and breaks ties with fellow Christians who share the situation of oppression.

Of course, the question may well be raised whether this argument against western cultural captivity does not apply to all cultures, including those on the underside of history. Does this emphasis not merely substitute one cultural captivity for another? There are, at least, two replies which may be given to this question. First, lack of acknowledgemnt of the effect of cultural conditioning on the formulation of faith is a particular characteristic of Western evangelical theology, as examples given above have demonstrated. Third world evangelical theologies which criticize this aspect of Western theology do not make the same claims to objectivity but are more consciously contextual. Second, third world contexts in which experiences of poverty and oppression are more pronounced are situations closer to much of the experience expressed in the bible, and therefore, as already noted, create a hermeneutical advantage for those within them.

3. Challenge to A-Historical Models

In the discussion of the incarnational nature of a theology of the poor I emphasized the way in which this theology displays a historically concrete character. Its expression is in terms of God's involvement in actual life situations which give it a specific and particular character in contrast to the more abstract and universal formulations of conservative evangelicalism. This factor in the radical evangelical theology of the poor challenges the models of interpretation common in the dominant evangelical community which appear as a-historical. By this I mean that they are less historically conscious both in terms of the effects of biblical history on biblical theology and also of the influence of contemporary situations on interpretation and formulation. The term a-historicism is not used here to indicate denial of historical reality, but rather neglect of its implications through focus on abstract universal principles.

A good example of a radical evangelical hermeneutic which challenges the a-historicism of mainline evangelicalism is that of Vinay Samuel. He seeks to interpret scripture acknowledging the cultural factors which influence the whole process. He begins with the incarnation and reflects on Jesus, his mission and message, in terms of his context in which his involvement related especially to standing on the side of the poor and commitment to change within that context. Concerning this method he writes:

> This model helps us to probe the following ways for deciding the Bible's meaning. First, it calls us to examine Jesus closely in his complete context. It calls us to examine the socio-economic and political context of Palestine, and examine the stances Jesus took to reveal God's will and purpose. It calls us to read the New Testament from the standpoint of the gospels, and not to begin with the apparently more universalistic statements of the epistles. Secondly it calls us to see that the Bible can only be interpreted faithfully to its intention by people committed to their contexts in the same way that Jesus was committed to His. It is interesting to note that the most extensive biblical study at the recent Consultation on World Evangelisation at Pattaya in June 1980 appears in the report of the study on "Christian Witness to the Urban Poor", from people deeply immersed in evangelism and the search for justice among poor people. Thirdly, it calls for us not to seek as the goal of Bible study abstract universal truths, but to seek by word and deed to incarnate in our context the words and work of Jesus (Sugden 1988:382-383).

In this hermeneutical procedure Samuel is a good model of new evangelical methods of interpretation particularly from third world contexts. This contextual hermeneutic may be described as follows:

First, in it the biblical text and contemporary context are closely joined. This means that exegesis of the text cannot effectively take place in isolation from conscious awareness of contemporary context which directly influences the way in which the interpreter reads the bible. Sugden has written of Samuel's method: "It makes an integral connection between the exegesis of the text and the discovery of its meaning in a contemporary context in a way that the classic evangelical approach does not" (1988:350).

Second, the purpose of biblical interpretation is to incarnate that pattern of thought and life seen in Jesus in modern situations. This is a thoroughly "historically concrete" approach and challenges a-historical models of interpretation.

Third, this challenge relates particularly to a-historicism as it is reflected in the formulation of "abstract biblical truths". It seems to me that Samuel's approach implies that where interpreters attempt to pursue biblical understanding in isolation from their contexts and with insufficient attention to the influence of biblical context on biblical formulation, then the outcome will be the production of static statements of doctrine which have little effect on Christian obedience. This is because the prime purpose of interpretation, the incarnation of the thought and actions of Jesus in our present history, is replaced by formal objective statements and the impact of truth is lost in its abstraction from concrete historical reality. This process reduces motivation for obedience and creates the feeling that biblical truth is irrelevant to life. Sugden writes of Samuel's hermeneutic: "The goal of this process will not just be the formulation of truths or doctrines, but motivations and guidelines for Christian being and doing in situations of social need of all kinds" (1988:350-351). While this approach does not imply that "statements of faith" have no value, it does suggest that making them central determinants of faith has very negative consequences.

In the previous chapter the tension between particular and universal references of biblical interpretation was noted. In it I argued that the movement should be from the particular to the universal rather than vice versa. This implies a way of understanding in which interpretation begins with the subjective experience of historical encounter rather than with the formulation of universally applicable principles. This applies both to the way in which the bible is read (Samuel's beginning with the specifics of the gospels rather than universal statements of the epistles), and also to the acknowledgement of preconditioning in contemporary experi-

ence. This is a theme to be further pursued in the consideration of "starting point". At this time the following observations are, I believe, pertinent.

This affirmation of subjectivity is not intended to deny the existence of objective norms of truth expressed in God's self revelation. Its emphasis rather is on the fact that access to these is not gained merely through the mechanisms of knowledge characteristic of Western ways of thinking in which the formulation of abstract propositions is a primary method.

What really is at stake is the kind of a-historicism that emerges when Western methods of knowing are identified with formulations claiming to represent biblical truth. William Dyrness says:

> ...looking at Scripture in isolation from its context may tempt us to overlook the mind-sets and cultural predispositions with which we come to Scripture. We may then be blind to our tendency to focus on particular themes in the Bible while overlooking others. While teaching in Asia I became aware how often Western readers tended to see the truth of Scripture in abstract terms, while Asian readers tended to focus on narrative and concrete images (1985:162).

Reading the bible as a set of abstract propositions leads to a theology in which the belief is fostered that "propositional statements are the purest form of truth. In fact, however, the proposition most often reflects the abstraction of truth from its circumstantial expression" (Dyrness 1985:165). The problem with this approach is that it is far more prone to produce a form of Christianity divorced from historical realities. Experience of Western evangelicalism strongly supports this impression. The abstractness of much of its theological formulation tends to multiply itself in the abstraction of a "spiritual life" divorced from its social context. In a historically specific approach, on the other hand, a dialogue quality (in contrast to straight application from text to context) tends to encourage a form of Christian living in which theology is far more integrated with life.

Charles Kraft has written of the way in which static closed models of doctrinal truth rationally enunciated from one mind to another are at variance both with biblical perspectives and models common in third world situations.

> ...concern for truth...led the early Christians to be *devoted to truth in a sense different from the way in which evangelicals ordinarily think of it.* They were not content with the comfortably abstracted formulations of truth that often seems to be the primary concern of contemporary conservatism. The truth for which the early followers of Christ gave themselves had come to them with the kind of impact that comes only through life involvement with those (Jesus and the apostles) who had sold out to that truth. It was *dynamic, impactful truth.* And it was manifested in transformed behaviour, not merely in intellectual credence to accurate but static statements concerning that truth (1979:39).

4. Challenge to the Grammatico-Historical Method

A contextual theology of the poor has thus far been seen to challenge the cultural captivity and a-historicism often appearing in mainline evangelicalism. We come now to the crucial challenge posed by this contextual theology, its questioning of the grammatico-historical method which characterizes much of Western evangelical interpretation.

In the previous section we considered the hermeneutical method of Vinay Samuel. It is a method which, as we have seen, contrasts clearly with that common among conservative evangelicals. Chris Sugden has said that in his hermeneutic "Samuel distances himself from the grammatico-historical method favoured by many Western evangelical theologians" (1988:383). Samuel has written of the grammatico-historical method:

> The dominant interpretative method among evangelicals has been the search for the original meaning of the text by historical and linguistic analysis and then its application to contemporary situations.
>
> The scholar enters into the culture, language and world of the original author and recipients. The meanings con-

> tained in the text are expected to be unlocked by a painstaking application of grammatical and historical studies. Exegesis then lays bare the original meaning which can then be applied to any situation (Samuel, 1989:78).

4.1. Dependence on Western Ways of Knowing

Samuel criticizes the grammatico-historical method because it leans too heavily on Western ways of knowing. He refers to its dependence on the philosophical concepts of the European Enlightenment with its assumption that these can be used in "a plain grammatical sense approach" to interpret meaning. However, says Samuel: "Making sense differs from culture to culture and among disciplines in a culture". These different ways of perceiving meaning indicate that: "What we call making sense is a human activity and therefore as flawed and limited as any human activity" (1989:79). These perceptions require a contextual approach to interpretation.

> We now recognise that we cannot make our starting point other than our present historical and cultural situation. We cannot rid ourselves, our reasoning faculties or our linguistic skills of the culture in which we have acquired them and in which we continue to make sense for ourselves" (1989:79).

As we have already seen, taking a contextual approach means a readiness to challenge formulations in which theology addresses the needs of unbelievers in preference to those of sufferers. In the affirmation that a theology of the poor is shaped by suffering a thoroughly contextual statement has been made. It assumes that Western ways of knowing and metaphysical categories cannot be made normative for theology irrespective of its context.

4.2. Application of an Already Formulated Message

According to Samuel the problem with the grammatico-historical method is that it implies that the meaning of scripture is the same in its original context as it is in the context where it is being read. For Samuel, while it is legitimate to say that scripture's meaning in its original context is authoritative for that context, the meaning of scripture in current contexts only becomes apparent through the process of reading and obeying it in present situations (Sugden 1988:383-384).

The issue of context, for Samuel, relates to the understanding of the gospel itself. With change in context so there must be corresponding change in the nature of "Christian faith and obedience".

> For Samuel the issue of the context of the gospel is not the issue of the application or relevance of an already formulated gospel in a new context. That would imply that the gospel was already adequately known and had only to be applied in different contexts. For him the issue is that the meaning of the gospel itself only becomes meaningful in a context....His theological argument is that:
>
> "studies in cultural anthropology appear in our estimation to have brought to theology the challenge that we cannot speak of a universal and timeless formulation of Christian truth which can be proclaimed to all men irrespective of their time and place, because each culture has its own distinct horizon of meanings" (Sugden 1988:285).

There is an example of Samuel's method in an illustration he uses of how it might work in a South African situation.

> If we were seeking the meaning of the Bible together in South Africa, we would have to study the stances Jesus took on the issues of racial, social and economic divisions. We would engage in this study as we as a community sought to break down the barriers between black and white and rich and poor. We would perhaps discover tremendous meaning in the themes forgiveness, loving enemies, overcoming distrust and fear, establishing just economic and social relationships, confronting the authorities, suffering and yet emerging victorious (Sugden 1988:384).

I see three basic factors in this statement of Samuel's which express something of the character of evangelical contextual interpretation.

First, he relates what the text means to the questions addressed to it. In this case these are questions which arise from a South African context and reveal South African needs. Thus he can speak of studying the stances of Jesus on issues "of racial, social and economic divisions", the key South African questions to be addressed to the bible. In other contexts the text would speak differently because of different questions being answered. This denies that the bible says the same thing in the same way irrespective of the situation in which it speaks. Meaning depends on the kinds of questions being answered.

In speaking of the process of applying the gospel to actual situations Willem Nicol has said:

> The concept "contextualization"...expresses that there is actually more to this process than trying to communicate a fixed entity. It is not that our understanding of the Gospel is a first phase, and that the application of this understanding is a separate, second phase. Our context puts new questions to the Gospel which helps us to understand it in a new way....If we consciously try to wrestle with the meaning of the gospel within our context, we can be liberated from theological ossification. Each theology is in some way a contextual interpretation of the Gospel, and the danger is that interpretations from past contexts become venerable traditions and bind us. Our theology and evangelism then become a repetition of words that are no longer contextual or relevant. Faith becomes the acceptance of certain truths that are not so relevant that they are really demanding to follow. A contextual evangelism, however, will challenge people to follow Jesus in terms of the realities of their context to hear the divine command of the hour, and this will definitely never be cheap grace. Then the presentation of the gospel to the rich and the poor will not be identical, as the rich will be challenged to do justice and the poor not to flee their responsibility (1986:78-79).

Second, Samuel relates reflection to praxis. Interpretation, he says, must be done in the context of a community engaged in break-

ing down barriers between conflicting groups. Here is a similar emphasis to that of Orlando Costas in his statement that "everything I know is intrinsically bound to everything that I do. Because knowledge is contextual, it is also practical" (1982:4). Samuel's example challenges assumptions that knowledge can safely be thought of as preceding action. Rather, it is gained in the midst of action, particularly that action related to meeting the deepest needs of specific societies. This implies that the reading of texts isolated from the struggle to live as disciples in concrete situations cannot yield the meaning of these texts. This endorses Samuel's emphasis, already noted, that the purpose of interpretation is the incarnation of the thought and actions of Jesus, and not just the formulation of abstract doctrinal statements.

Third, he relates themes to be emphasized to the situations in which they are considered. Thus the meaning of the bible in South Africa relates particularly to those themes whose emphasis is demanded by the needs of this context. This denies that the bible can be read with the assumption that all the issues it speaks to are equally relevant wherever it is read. A reading of the bible from the perspective of the oppressed and a view of South African society measured by its treatment of its most vulnerable members suggests that many of the issues focussed on by, for example, South African white evangelicals are irrelevant to this situation. Definitions of biblical inspiration and inerrancy, debates concerning divine election and human responsibility, questions about premillennial eschatology, have little bearing on the life situations especially of oppressed people caught in the midst of the South African conflict. The fact that these and other similar questions are high profile issues among white South African evangelicals indicates the degree to which the challenge of this contextual theology is needed.

4.3. Problem of Universal Relevance

Samuel's contextual emphasis raises a real problem concerning the universality of the gospel. He denies that the gospel is formulated in the same terms in all situations. "We distort the gospel, and prevent people understanding it if we seek one set of timeless truths, to be proclaimed as they appear in the scriptures in the same way to all men" (Sugden 1988:442). On the other hand, according to Sugden, in his hermeneutics there is "the assumption that the same gospel is addressed to all people, whatever the variations in the formulations" (1988:286).

The questions may well be asked: How can the gospel be good news to all people if its formulation is not constant in all contexts? How can contextual evangelicals assume that it is in essence the same gospel that is proclaimed in a variety of contexts? I see, at least, two ways in which Samuel seeks to address this seeming inconsistency between holding to a universal gospel and affirming variations of contextual interpretation.

First, despite his statements already noted concerning the poor being a lens for understanding the gospel, he also speaks in terms of an inter-contextual reading through which the meaning of scripture becomes apparent. Sugden relates this concept in Samuel to the need for reconciliation between various groups.

> The reason for articulating the meaning of the gospel to different groups is to expound the meaning of the gospel to that group in relation to its reconciliation with another group.
>
> Samuel suggests that the appropriate way to reach a true understanding of the scripture is for cross cultural readings, where Christians from different cultures share their insights. Based on this perspective, we could go further and suggest that the very process of sharing assists and expresses the process of reconciliation. People have to realize that their group does not have the full and complete understanding of God's revelation: they need to learn from the insights of other Christians from different social, economic and racial groups....

> The process of contextualization is therefore an important step in the process of reconciliation. For it prevents the theological formulations of one group determining the Christian identity of people in other groups (1988:465-467).

We have noted more than once Samuel's view that "the meaning of the gospel for the poor in scripture defines the meaning of the good news for everyone" (Sugden 1988:231,291,472). It is extremely difficult, in my view, to reconcile his inter-contextual perspective with this emphasis in his hermeneutic. If as Sugden says Samuel affirms that "The meaning of this good news is to be focussed on what it means to the poor in order to gain its meaning for everybody" (1988:291), then it seems self-contradictory to affirm an inter-contextual reading in which meaning is gained by combining insights from various contexts. Does this apply to the insights of the rich also? It seems to me that in his inter-contextual emphasis Samuel switches from his model of understanding gained for all through the instrumentality of the poor to a more universal model of understanding which logically denies this instrumentality. This critique does not imply a denial of the need of all Christians to learn from the insights of others. It questions the compatibility of this inter-contextual model with readings based on the context of the poor. Teachability and respect for other Christian perspectives is one thing, combining such insights to provide a basis for a universal gospel is another.

In the second place, Samuel also endeavours to deal with the problem of universality by reference to what Sugden calls "supracultural themes". In Samuel's theology there is acknowledgement both of formulations of the gospel which have particular cultural relevance, and also of these "supracultural themes" which have broader reference. His point is that while "there are supracultural themes in the Christian faith, those themes are not applied directly to the context as a formulation of a supracultural reality" (Sugden 1988:372-373). These themes are made specific by appropriate formulations in particular cultural contexts. Sugden writes:

> For Samuel, the themes remain constant, but in all cases the formulations will differ, depending on the context in which the gospel is shared. Thus for Samuel there is no one supracultural formulation. Samuel explains his understanding that
>
> ..."most of the formulations in current evangelical usage arise from the context of youth and university student ministries. The young people in such contexts are dominated by identity and purpose crises. The Gospel formulations are effective to meet these needs. It is obvious that different formulations would be needed for poor rural communities, the non-literate labourer etc." (1988:375).

Examples of Samuel's supra-cultural themes are

> ...the authority of Scripture, the divinity and humanity of Christ, the death and resurrection of Christ, the necessity of accepting the offer of salvation by personal decision and by repentance and belief in Jesus, the church as the family of God, the gift of an immediate relationship with God by the presence of the Holy Spirit in an individual's life (Sugden 1988:373).

I see an immediate problem in Samuel's approach because the selection of supra-cultural themes itself involves interpretation and understanding which will vary greatly. Therefore affirmations of supra-cultural themes will not necessarily provide the constancy of meaning which is desired. Nevertheless, I see this argument of Samuel's as having more helpful potential in this debate than the inter-contextual argument. Its helpfulness lies in its suggested distinction between faith and its formulation. While I believe that the distinction between cultural and supra-cultural is of some value it does not directly address the key issue of the way in which the universal gospel relates to the particular privilege of the poor.

In my thinking the essential problem in the contextual-universal debate relates not so much to differences between cultural particularism and supra-cultural universalism, but between a particularism related to the epistemological privilege of the poor and a universalism where this plays no part. At the heart of the issue lies

the question whether the poor can be conceived as heralds of the gospel or not. If they can, and an understanding of the gospel is mediated through them, the implication is that there can be no universal gospel without reference to the poor. It is not, I believe, a question of whether the gospel is for all people or only for the poor. Few would maintain this kind of exclusivism. It is a question of the nature of this gospel which comes to all people, and how it is formulated in various contexts.3 So when Samuel denies that the gospel is "one set of timeless truths" to be communicated in the same way to all, he is not denying access to the gospel to anyone. He is, however, denying, at least from my perspective, that in its relevant formulation in any culture it can omit the element of being "good news to the poor".

I suggest that the concept of God's preferential option for the poor developed in the previous chapter is a more helpful way to address this perplexing problem than reference to inter-contextual reading or supra-cultural themes. A preferential option does not exclude all people from God's love but affirms the particular significance of the poor both as objects and instruments of that love. There are obvious problems attached to this argument. In what way does a reference to the poor affect the formulation of the gospel to the non-poor and how can this be made relevant to their needs? How can this message be good news to all and at the same time be firstly good news to the poor? These and other questions have no easy solution. But this approach does attempt to face both the affirmation of a preferential option for the poor and the broader reference of God's love. It points, I believe, towards ways of holding to both universal relevance and contextual particularism without denying the validity of either.

In the previous sections various challenges to the methodology of the dominant evangelical community have been mentioned. In the light of these considerations the challenge of a contextual understanding to a conservative evangelical hermenuetic may be summarized in the following ways.

(1) A contextual perspective challenges the tendency to divorce the biblical text from the contemporary context. The assumption that interpretation can proceed without proper reference to the situation of the interpreter leads to the claiming of divine sanction for formulations which are contextually determined. This was demonstrated in our section on cultural captivity.

(2) The conservative evangelical inclination to abstraction has also been challenged. We have noted that the purpose of interpretation is the incarnation of the thought and deeds of Jesus in contemporary situations. Where there is strong emphasis on abstract formulations of truth interpretation loses this character and reflection is divorced from praxis. The result is often a dualistic understanding expressed in separation between "spiritual life" and social context.

(3) Contextual theology also challenges the way of thinking evident in the conservative tradition's emphasis on objective truth expressed in clearly enunciated propositions. This focus ignores the subjective and relative elements which so clearly influence understanding and formulation.4 Challenging static ways of thinking evident in Western evangelicalism and suggesting a more dynamic approach William Dyrness has said:

> This means that Scripture will function more like a musical score than a blueprint for our lives.5 A score gives guidance but it must always be played afresh. Seeing Scripture as a blueprint not only overlooks the reality of historical change and the changes in consciousness that result from this but also misunderstands the way God works. It implies a static understanding of culture in which God cannot do something new which is consistent with Scripture and thereby provide a fresh musical interpretation which reflects modern sensitivities (1985:171).

(4) From the contextual perspective it appears that the claims made for many of the formulations in mainline evangelicalism constitute a type of cultural imperialism. This is particularly evident in mission history where Western formulations were exported and im-

posed without reference to the categories and traditions of third world converts. This imperialistic spirit is challenged by a contextual emphasis which provides space for alternative ways of understanding and is less disposed to make excessive claims for its formulations. It is a challenge to dependence on Western ways of knowing.

(5) A further challenge is to ways in which conservative evangelicals ignore the role of the context of the interpreter, particularly in the grammatico-historical method. This method reflects a movement from biblical text to context with no reverse move from context to text playing a significant part. Its prime actions are investigation of the text by the interpreter, formulation of the results obtained, and application to life. Its omission of the influence of contextual factors on the whole process is challenged by the kind of theology represented in this thesis.

5. Interaction: an Alternative Approach

The kind of a-contextualism that is being challenged calls for an alternative approach. Something of the contextual character of a theology of the poor has already been reflected but its interactionist quality which makes it a clear alternative to the dominant method needs to be spelled out. This section attempts this and also develops some aspects of this alternative hermeneutical method.

It is safe to assert that all contextualization, at least within a Christian setting, involves some form of action or relationship between the contemporary context and the biblical text. This is so because all Christian theology relates in some way both to the bible and the situation of the interpreter. Contextualization is a recognition of these two poles of theological reflection and the inter-relationship or interaction between them.

In evangelical theology the traditional emphasis has rested heavily on the "pole" of scripture. The normativeness of the biblical text has been strongly emphasized, often to the exclusion of any acknowledgment of the contemporary context. This however, according to Robert K. Johnston, is no longer the case.

> Evangelicals are increasingly becoming involved in contextual theology. This is not without its debate, however. The growing difference within evangelicalism regarding contextualization is described helpfully by David Wells...: "In the one understanding of contextualization, the revelatory trajectory moves only from authoritative Word into contemporary culture; in the other, the trajectory moves both from text to context and from context to text...." Increasingly, evangelicals are opting for the second of these models - an "interactionist" approach, to use William Dyrness' terminology. Mission strategists and Third World evangelicals like Charles Kraft, Rene Padilla, and Harvie Conn are arguing strongly for a hermeneutical circulation....
>
> Others such as Clark Pinnock, are suspicious of such two-way conversation, believing Scripture's authority to be compromised in the process (1985:6-7).

This distinction between a one-way and two-way movement highlights the difference between traditional evangelical theology (a one-way street from Word to context) and radical evangelical theology where traffic flows in both directions. In consideration of the context of the poor it is obvious that the theology being formed is one involving hermeneutical circulation. That is, within it formulations of biblical truth are not made in isolation from contextual categories, the context also speaks to the text. Dyrness expresses it: "This way of thinking suggests that Scripture actually functions in an interaction between my own experience, the encounter with the text, and the reality of God through this" (1985:159).

What clearly emerges in this reflection on the interactionist approach is that the contemporary context is itself a component in the formulation of the gospel. Our context does not function merely as a passive receptor, it is an actor in the formation of theology. The human context is one of the sources of theology. This perspective challenges the view that contextualization is merely

the relevant application of an already formulated message to a specific situation. In speaking of a contextual evangelization in which the situation of the poor is crucial for understanding the gospel Orlando Costas has said: "contextual evangelization is not simply the application of the gospel to a given situation but rather the communication of the good news from the 'base' or 'margin' where we find the absentees of history, the most vulnerable and needy people of society" (1989:148-149).

A good example of the interactionist method is seen in the hermeneutics of C. Rene Padilla. He proposes that we begin with our situation, analyze it and listen to the questions which it raises. Then scripture is approached with these questions in the recognition that the kind of questions we bring to the bible depends on our world-and-life view. In the presentation of these questions, however, we listen to the bible for not only does life illuminate scripture, but scripture illuminates life. As the answers of the bible become apparent our initial questions may have to be reformulated "to reflect the biblical perspective more accurately" (Costas 1989:8-9). Costas further reflects this by saying: "Padilla...goes to Scripture with questions from the situation and then back to the situation with questions from Scripture. In the process the interpreter's world-and-life view is challenged and the questions he or she asks are refined" (1989:155). This method of Padilla's may be seen as involving three stages. First, analyzing the situation, then bringing its questions to the bible, and third listening to scripture and allowing it to refine our questions and thought. This is a circulation process or as Costas says "a spiral structure" (1989:9). It is a helpful model for evangelical hermeneutics because it acknowledges both the contribution of the interpreter's context and the normativeness of scripture in the interchange between context and biblical text.

5.1. Authority of Scripture

We noted above that Clark Pinnock expressed suspicion of the two way conversation between biblical text and context because he sees it as compromising the authority of scripture (Johnston 1985:7). The model we have just considered however, is characterized by its reference to scripture as the controlling norm in the hermeneutical process. It is my contention that contrary to compromising the authority of scripture, a contextual theology of the poor not only acknowledges it but makes it a more credible and relevant factor in formulation.

In considering the relationship between the biblical text and the contemporary context we must, I believe, avoid formulations which will deny effective partnership to either in the theological process. The interactionist approach implies that space must be provided for movement from both poles of the spectrum from which our theology emerges. Having said this, however, we cannot avoid facing the question which inevitably does come up; the question of priority. Is the partnership between contemporary context and biblical text one of equality, or is there a major partner? Put in another way: is the norm by which theology is to be measured for it to be Christian, a norm derived from both biblical text and context, or a norm which comes from one or the other? It is at this point that the evangelical principle of the authority of scripture is pertinent. This affirms that within the movement from both poles of the spectrum (biblical and contemporary), there is a priority in the biblical text which makes it the determining norm by which theology must be measured. To revert to the earlier analogy of the tune played by the musician, if the tune is to harmonize with truth it must reflect the intention of the composer expressed in the score. Freedom of interpretation does not mean freedom to substitute a new composition.

In affirming an evangelical position of the priority of the biblical text over the contemporary context, Chris Sugden's formulation

of Vinay Samuel's position is helpful: "he sees theology as contextually dependent, he does not see theology as contextually regulated" (1988:315). This statement has value for it affirms the active contribution of context, for theology cannot function independent of it. Therefore a true dependence does exist, our understanding of the gospel is not merely explications of abstractly conveyed propositions, it involves our historical situations and all the human factors that contribute to the process of understanding. This dependence, on the other hand, does not imply a priority or dominance of context. As an evangelical, the regulation of theology for Samuel cannot finally come from context. This priority belongs to scripture. Thus the formulation which is sought in the conversation between text and context has as its aim the expression of that Word which comes from God and is found in scripture, and this formulation ultimately must be judged by it. In this sense the biblical text may be said to have priority over the contemporary context.

It is not however sufficient to talk in terms of priority when thinking of scripture and the contemporary context. The danger with an exclusive emphasis on this factor could be a form of dualism in which the bible is separated from context and divine action related only to the controlling norm and not to the contemporary situation. Therefore I suggest that in viewing the interchange between the bible and context it must be the interaction itself and not only one pole of it which is seen as conveying the Word of God to people in their situations. While it is the bible and not context which is affirmed as controlling norm and authoritaive text, in terms of the actual coming of the Word of God to which witness is borne in scripture, it is the entire contextual process in which God actually speaks. This suggests that if this kind of interchange does not take place then the Word of God does not effectively come to people. In the light of this I would say that in the contextual theology being formulated here we may speak of the Word of God in the following terms. God's Word is his interpreted speech acted on in obedience which comes through under-

standing gained in concrete situations to whose questions scripture has provided an answering response in the form of authoritative and controlling norms for thought and action.

On the one hand this model challenges other evangelical models which reflect either a one way movement from scripture to situation or a division between biblical text and context which denies the effective agency of God's speech in the whole contextual process. On the other hand it challenges other contextual models in which the role of scripture as a controlling norm is denied and in which it functions only as one of the referents in the process. The words of Edward Schillebeeckx about history apply also to the situation where the interpreter puts a question to the biblical text: "The critical problem is whether one simply looks to history to confirm one's already established views or whether one allows them to be put to the test by history" (1981:100).

5.2. Starting Point

Some evangelicals believe that in the hermeneutical process we must start with scripture and move from it into our situations by applying its principles to these situations. In criticizing theologies of liberation such evangelicals challenge the liberationist practise of starting with context and moving from it to scripture. This is regarded as denying, or at least compromising the principle of biblical authority. Derek Morphew writes how in various movements within the church there has been an acknowledgement of context but from a perspective where

> ...all these movements aimed at starting with the word of God, not the circumstances, and sought to change their culture through the word, not vice versa. The starting point is crucial. Black theology, it would seem, like Afrikaner theology, begins with the historical context and reinterprets scripture accordingly. The danger is that the absolutes of the word will be less decisive, than the relative interests of the situation (1989:170).

Morphew speaks strongly of the dangers of starting from context "because man loves to recreate God in his own image" and therefore we "must be careful to avoid a `timebound' message" (1989:171). He affirms a clearly objective approach to understanding. "I have argued elsewhere that theology should operate with a method which is similar to what the philosophers of science call `critical rationalism', and that truth should be publicly verifiable and in that sense more objective than subjective" (1989:171). Despite these strong affirmations he acknowledges that the "hermeneutical circle" is a fact which because of our "human weakness" we cannot avoid. There is an ambivalence which I read in Morphew here, he acknowledges "that we all approach the Bible with human assumptions and spectacles", but in his overall emphasis strongly asserts that we must begin from the bible and not our experience (1989:170-171).

Another example of evangelical objection to starting from context is seen in Michael Cassidy who in his listing of "reservations" concerning the "weaknesses" of liberation theology in the first of his eleven points says: "Liberation Theology's insistence on starting with the context bothers me. For those of us who seek to make the Bible our final authority in all matters of faith and morals, there is a problem in starting with the context and then moving to the Bible rather than vice versa" (1989:507).

At this point the following observations concerning the question of "starting point" are, I believe, pertinent.

(1) I see a degree of confusion in Morphew's argument on this issue. He speaks for instance of Black theology beginning with context and reinterpreting scripture accordingly (1989:170), implying that it is the wrong starting point which causes scripture to be misinterpreted. An evangelical, however, may start with scripture (if this is possible) and also reinterpret or misinterpret it. I suggest that the bible can be misinterpreted whether the starting point is the context or scripture itself. Correct interpretation is not determined by starting point. I doubt that many evangeli-

cals would affirm the implications of the converse of Morphew's argument, that to start with scripture would guarantee, or at least make likely a correct interpretation. This would mean that the interpretation of people like Jehovah's Witnesses, which in principle starts with the bible, would have a high degree of probable correctness, a conclusion that not many evangelicals would like. My argument is that the concept of starting point should not be applied to assessments of the correctness or otherwise of biblical exegesis. It is a term which decribes a method which like any other method can be misused and lead to misinterpretation.

(2) Another tendency among evangelicals is to equate a belief in the authority of the bible with a particular hermeneutical method, that of starting from the biblical text. This is seen in Cassidy's statement which says in effect that belief in biblical authority requires this particular method (1989:507). I believe that this is a confusing argument which easily can lead to misrepresentation. It identifies a particular way of reading the bible with belief in the bible and implies that the point at issue in this method is whether scripture is authoritative. I suggest that the point at issue here is not the authority of the bible, but the way in which this authority is seen to operate. In the previous section I referred to the method of evangelical theologian Rene Padilla for whom scripture operates as an authority in a way somewhat different to that of Cassidy. The implication of Cassidy's statement is that suspicion is thrown on the biblical commitment of other interpreters whose method differs from his own, and therefore, as I have said, it can lead to misrepresentation. I believe that in the developing theology of this thesis (note the previous section), it is being shown that a thoroughly contextual approach which begins with the human situation is not incompatible with belief in biblical authority.

(3) The emphasis on the necessity for the bible to be our starting point also, I believe, effectively reduces the contextual impact of scripture. To speak too strongly about the importance of the bible

as a "starting point" creates a tension between the two poles of theological reflection and has the effect of creating suspicion of the endeavour to be contextual. Strongly asserting it as a theological principle can easily lead to a theology which is abstract and unrelated to life.

(4) My major argument is that in the claim that the bible must be our starting point a basic confusion relating to the meaning of the term "starting point" exists. For Cassidy the term seems to indicate a metaphysical principle whose affirmation is required on theological grounds. It is this factor which creates the problem in accepting context as a starting point, for this to him appears to involve abandoning biblical authority. I think that this approach reads too much of the wrong kind of theological significance into the meaning of "starting point". It is linked too closely to the need for the bible to be our controlling norm. It is far better, I believe, to see "starting point" merely as referring to a hermeneutical method which reflects the sociological reality that knowledge is gained within a context and that our approach to the bible is conditioned by this fact. This recognition, it is true, proposes a way of doing theology in which there is a greater emphasis on the human situation, but it in no way implies any lessening of the need for a final controlling norm by which theology is tested. It appears to me then, that in the debate about the need to start our hermeneutic from the bible, misunderstanding exists due to the simple fact that the term "starting point" is being used in different ways by different people.

The danger which people like Cassidy and Morphew are legitimately concerned about, that of reading our prejudices into the bible, exists wherever human preconceptions cloud understanding irrespective of how the question of starting point may be perceived.

(5) Starting with our human context is something which, I believe, is unavoidable. As human beings we are incapable of starting anywhere else. Only God can start with God. Thus, I suggest that we

need to recognize the human relatedness of all our knowledge and its implication that all interpreters, including those who profess to begin with the bible, take their point of departure from where they are in life. To repeat an earlier quote from Vinay Samuel: "We now recognise that we cannot make our starting point other than our present historical and cultural situation. We cannot rid our selves, our reasoning faculties or our linguistic skills of the culture in which we have acquired them and in which we continue to make sense for ourselves" (1989:79).

This issue of starting in our human situation is important for at least two reasons. First, it helps to combat abstract approaches to theology in which understanding is separated from human experience. Second, it lessens inclinations for false claims to be made for theological formulations and biblical interpretations by highlighting the effects of context on understanding.

In writing of the mission strategies of Wayan Mastra and Vinay Samuel, and referring to the use of "starting points" in these, Chris Sugden has said:

> Both their mission strategies begin from inside the culture and the context of their community and seek to be contextual to each group. With each group they encounter, they seek different starting points which, in the light of their view on the continuity between the gospel and God's prior work in a community, will represent places where God has been at work, which begin from starting points within the culture. For the theological reflection through which they let the context shape the formulation of the good news to that context identifies starting points within the culture in question where there is a continuity with or specific challenge from the Christian faith (1988:414).

This mission procedure roots the formulation of the gospel in contemporary history and therefore avoids the pitfall of trying to communicate a message which does not relate to people at the point where they are in the world.

William Dyrness has spoken to this same issue as follows:

> To understand Scripture properly we must begin not with a doctrine of Scripture but with our life in the world. This follows not only from the importance of our particular starting point but also from the way we come to know anything at all....Our faith therefore is necessarily expressed and understood in terms of our particular setting. This need not be seen as a handicap; it is rather a recognition of our existence in society and history. This means moreover that our reflection on and use of Scripture must also take their impetus and starting point from the forces that shape our consciousness (1985:160).

These quotations reinforce the argument that starting the hermeneutical process from the context of the interpreter is a fact required by the way in which human beings acquire knowledge.

5.3. Theologies of Liberation

A third issue which needs to be addressed in considering the alternative to a-contextual evangelical models of interpretation is how radical evangelical contextual theology relates to theologies of liberation. This is a consideration which rises naturally from the previous discussions which imply a certain degree of similarity between an evangelical contextual theology and a liberationist perspective.

This is a vast subject whose proper treatment would require a thorough analysis of the methodology of theologies of liberation and ways in which this has been assessed by evangelicals. It is beyond the purpose of this thesis to attempt this extensive task. At this point I will merely attempt the more modest task of providing a summary outline of the some of the salient features which relate to this relationship.

5.3.1. General Critical Reflection

In a the second chapter I referred briefly to Orlando Costas' assessment of liberation theology. He sees three problems in it. They are, the primacy given to political dimensions of faith, a too optimistic view of human nature coupled with a "synergistic concept of saving grace", and thirdly, an inadequate view of biblical authority (1982:128-131). We also noted the threefold challenge he sees within it: its challenge to those who neglect the biblical element of social transformation, its challenge to the sterility of academic theology, and the challenge by which it unmasks the ethical impotence of the institutional churches (1982:131).

It is particularly in the area of the way in which the authority of scripture is seen that evangelicals, and especially radical evangelicals who are in view here, criticize liberation theology. Though committed to its concept of the priority of the context of the poor in terms of formulating theology "from below", such evangelicals see in liberation theology a tendency to give social analysis a priority in formulating theology which denies the bible its normative function. For them the priority of the context of the poor is primarily not a concept derived from social analysis (such as Marxist analysis), but one which comes from the gospel and its revelation of Christ's incarnational identification with oppressed humanity.

In a key statement of Samuel's hermeneutics Sugden says:

> ...he analyses liberation theology as basing a commitment to the poor as much on a sociological analysis as on scripture....6 He himself claims to come to the scripture with the questions of the poor and read scripture from that perspective. The reason for coming with the questions of the poor is because of scripture's own directive that its gospel is good news to the poor, not because of a sociological analysis arrived at on other grounds (1988:315).

The following are two examples of radical evangelical critiques of liberation theology's perceived deficiency in the area of biblical authority. Sugden has quoted Samuel's criticism as follows:

> The danger of this position is that it can tend to base the need and nature of a commitment to the poor as much on a sociological analysis as on scripture. Scripture thus can become only a paradigm, an example and pattern of how, in earlier periods of history, God's people have been committed to the side of the poor. It is in no way authoritative for Christian conduct or obedience today (1988:258).

Orlando Costas writes:

> If the insistence of the theology of liberation on the necessity of taking seriously the concrete historical situation as a primary frame of reference is its greatest merit, it is also its greatest danger. For it insists on the situation as the "text" on which theology, understood as a critical reflection on the present historical praxis, is grounded. The Bible, tradition, the teaching of the church, history of doctrine, etc., are secondary frames of reference. The historical situation is, in other words, the only normative element in the hermeneutics of the theology of liberation.
>
> However, if the biblical text has only a comparative, descriptive function, how can the theology of liberation be sure of maintaining the distinctiveness of the Christian faith (1974:251)?

5.3.2. Recognition of Variation

The above two statements, however, do not reflect the distinctions which exist within liberation theology itself at this point. J Andrew Kirk has written of this, reflecting on the positions of Assmann, Segundo, and Miranda.

> Certain theologians, notably Assmann, consider the purity and normativeness of revolutionary practice to be so self-evidently true that there is little room for a contribution from biblical revelation as the Christian's fundamental source of truth. Others however, although they strongly criticise a methodology which has overtones of an idealistic pre-understanding of reality (the use of a deductive hermeneutic) are aware of the danger of taking ideological short cuts in theology when biblical

> revelation is not allowed a full part in the hermeneutical process.
>
> Segundo, in this context, criticises Assmann for failing to see that his "praxiological" position is just as a *priori* as the position of those who believe it inevitable and right to take their Christian pre-understanding of reality to their revolutionary praxis....As an alternative possibility he postulates the need to place "the specific Christian contribution, a revolutionary commitment and a new understanding of the evangelical message", within a hermeneutical *circle*, where each element contributes to a correct interpretation of both reality and the biblical message.
>
> This alternative, at least in theory, means that biblical revelation is able to make an original, and therefore critical contribution both to the mechanisms of theological thought and to revolutionary practice. Indeed, Miranda, recognises that in so far as theology is "critical reflection on historical practice in the light of faith" it is the biblical message which must finally determine whether it is the Faith which is being talked about or some other theory (1979:38-39).

Kirk's statement highlights the variation of emphasis within Latin American liberation theology. The term "liberation theology" however, has a broader reference than this. It encompasses various theologies of the oppressed, of which the Latin American is but the best known example, including black theology, Asian Minjung theology and feminist theology. Therefore it is preferable to speak in plural terms of "theologies of liberation" rather than the singular "liberation theology". The existence of this variety means that caution must be exercised and generalities avoided when statements are made concerning this theology. Thus the critiques of Samuel and Costas, while expressing overall emphases in Latin American liberation theologies, must be read with the acknowledgement that there are streams within it (e.g. Miranda) where the bible functions more authoritatively. We have already noted the biblical emphasis in the Base Church Communities in Brazil. In addition, there are indications in Gutierrez' Introduction to the Revised Edition of his *A Theology of Liberation* of a clearly enunciated dependence on biblical materials. He writes:

> The ultimate reason for commitment to the poor and oppressed is not to be found in the social analysis we use,

> or in human compassion, or in any direct experience, we ourselves may have of poverty. These are all doubtless valid motives that play an important part in our commitment. As Christians, however, our commitment is grounded, in the final analysis, in the God of our faith. It is a theocentric, prophetic option that has its roots in the unmerited love of God and is demanded by this love (1988:xxvii).

5.3.3. Evangelical and Liberationist Similarities

Evangelical assessments of liberation theology normally focus on the distinctions between the two theologies. David Lowes Watson however, has written of evangelical theology as "an ecclesiology of liberation" and suggested that the similarities between evangelicals and liberationists are highly significant. "Indeed, the similarity of perspective on Christianity and culture in these two theologies is potentially the most significant cutting edge of contemporary Christian witness" (Watson 1986:114). He mentions the following similarities.

> Both are critical of mainstream Western theology, arguing that it has been more accountable to its Enlightenment criteria of critical reflection than to the gospel....evangelical and liberation theologians alike seek to investigate the impact of the gospel on the human race. They regard the essential of the Christian message as efficacious in the lives of human beings in human society, and although they begin from very different hermeneutical starting points (the one of scriptural authority and the other of historical praxis),7 there is a common objective: to convince the world that the gospel of Jesus Christ is nothing less than the saving power of God over human sin, personal and social, cultural and systemic. Between the concern of evangelicalism to communicate the initiatives of God's salvation in Christ and the insights of liberationism, which point to the significance of those initiatives for human society, lies the potential for a creative synthesis that could provide a truly evangelistic theology for our time (1986:114-115).

This is, I believe, an emphasis which is fully justified. These items of similarity must, of course, not be allowed to cloud the overall picture of the relationship between the two theologies, but

they do suggest a necessary correction to one-sided emphases on distinction.

5.3.4. Contribution of J. Andrew Kirk

A valuable tool in this debate is Andrew Kirk's *Liberation Theology : An Evangelical View from the Third World.* In this work Kirk, who spent twelve years involved in theological education in Argentina, engages in a friendly conversation with Latin American liberation theology. He surveys its principal characteristics, and then in the second section analyses the theology of five of its leading exponents: Assmann, Gutierrez, Segundo, Croatto and Miranda. In the third section he looks at some of its principal biblical themes and then in a fourth section concludes with a critical dialogue through which he proposes "an alternative theology of liberation".

At the heart of his critique of liberation theology is his assessment that the social analysis on which it is based often takes over the whole theological process so that the influence of scripture is minimized. Of liberation theology he says:

> Its theological reflection has followed in the wake of its commitment to a determined praxis: it is 'a critical reflection on historical practice in the light of the Faith'. Orthopraxis takes precedence over orthodoxy: i.e. the criterion for measuring the correctness and usefulness of any theological formula is commitment to a process which will change situations of gross injustice (1979:144).

For Kirk this means that the role of scripture is effectively reduced and replaced by trust in a contemporary social understanding based on Marxist analysis.

> The theology of liberation has opted for a contemporary historical pre-understanding before approaching the text. By doing this, it believes that theology's perennial ideological problem will be solved and its contribution to man's liberation consequently maximised. This is not so, however, for the text questions and confronts man much more radically than does that particular ideology from which the option has been made. For this reason, we

> insist that the task of modern theology should be a consciously critical reflection on God's Word in the light of a contemporary praxis of liberation (1979:193).

In this emphasis Kirk turns the methodological process from reflecting on praxis in the light of faith to reflecting on faith (revealed in the biblical message) in the light of praxis. In this, as I understand it, he is attempting to secure the greatest degree of objectivity possible for theological evaluation and affirm that in the interchange between text and context the former will exercise a controlling influence. I understand his statement concerning reflecting on God's Word in the light of praxis to mean that the key reflection must be on scripture, this reflection and the responses it produces must be theology's primary catalyst. In this he clearly shows his evangelical commitment to the authority of scripture.

A second major criticism Kirk makes concerns the finality of Christ. In Croatto and Segundo particularly he perceives emphases which by their effect, if not through formal statement, relativize "Christ's finality as the ultimate source of God's truth" (1979:195). Kirk strongly affirms Christ's finality and questions whether leading liberation theologians (except Miranda) take it seriously enough (1979:198). He goes on to say:

> The definitive inauguration of the kingdom in Jesus Christ is the determining factor of all hermeneutics which seeks to be contemporary. In other words, the finality of Christ is a call not only to deduce a Christological hermeneutic from the Gospels, but also to practice all theological interpretation in the context of obedience to God's will disclosed in the coming of the kingdom (1979:198).

If, as Kirk affirms, this finality expressed in the coming of Christ's kingdom is accepted, then the insistence of liberation theology on the priority of praxis in the doing of theology becomes a great service for it moves "theology from a discussion about faith to the obedience of faith" (1979:198). It is in this light, I believe, that the importance of radical evangelical theology be-

comes apparent. By its adherence to biblical authority and the finality of Christ for theological interpretation as well as its insistence on contextualization in the theological task it performs a valuable service to theology. By holding to biblical authority it preserves that degree of objectivity necessary for maintaining Christian identity and affirms what is best in the evangelical tradition. By its contextual practice it affirms that most valuable aspect of liberation theology, its social relevance, and bears witnesses to the biblical norm that orthodoxy cannot exist without orthopraxy.

At the heart of this orthopraxy, as a key factor in the practice of "obedience to God's will disclosed in the coming of the kingdom" (Kirk 1979:198), is commitment to the oppressed-poor of society. In this respect radical evangelical theology and liberation theology share a significant and crucial unity and together issue a challenge to all forms of a-contextualism which by-pass this central concern. In words which could equally be applied to radical evangelical theology Andrew Kirk has said: "The theology of liberation issues a prophetic call today to the universal Christian Church to consider the sub-culture of poverty and inhumanity suffered by the people of the Third World as the pre-eminent context for today's hermeneutical task" (1979:199).

5.3.5. Option for the Poor: Significant Area of Correspondence

Andrew Kirk has proposed an "Alternative Theology of Liberation". I suggest that radical evangelical theology, particularly in its emphasis on the poor may be seen not just as an alternative (by its preservation of key evangelical distinctives), but also as a form of liberation theology. I do not imply any formal identification of the two theologies here, but merely the need to recognize that in certain important respects radical evangelical theology is a valid example of the vision represented in theologies of liberation. This is particularly evident in the shared commitment to the

oppressed poor. This commitment and the perspective of a theology done from the underside of history which it includes provides a common bond of true significance. In this shared perspective radical evangelical theology and liberation theology have, I believe, a oneness which effectively unites them in a vision of Christianity and society more significant than the more formal issues which divide them.

An item of real significance in this shared perspective is the fellowship of the oppressed. It needs to be recognized that in situations of oppression like South Africa, those who bear its burden and those who share its burden enter into an experience of fellowship whose unity assumes a deeply meaningful character. In the light of God's oneness with the poor those who together struggle for liberation of the captives experience a solidarity of purpose in which God's redeeming action in society may be discerned. Within a Christian context this reality suggests that evangelical attention should not focus on evangelical unity, but rather on broader and more important Christian unity. One speaker at the recent Baptist Convention National Awareness Workshop spoke of the effect of Baptist separation from other Christians exemplified in the way the Baptist Union has distanced itself from the SACC. "The Baptist Union's withdrawal or non membership of the SACC and the WCC has caused us to be alienated from benefiting from the fellowship of the oppressed" (Madolo 1990:60). This is, I believe a very perceptive observation. It implies for me, that a radical evangelical theology of the poor has the potential to fulfill a meaningful ecumenical purpose through its emphasis on the centrality of commitment to the poor. In contexts of oppression this emphasis becomes more important than the traditional focus of conservative evangelicalism on evangelical distinctives which has often served to divide Christians. In this way links between radical evangelicals and other Christians committed to the poor are forged which have more practical meaning than areas of formal doctrinal distinction.

In the concluding statement of his work on liberation theology Andrew Kirk has exposed the unifying potential of a shared commitment to the poor. He writes:

> As a complement to the whole discussion we have suggested a comprehensive, alternative approach to biblical interpretation; one which allows the distinctively biblical message of liberation through Jesus Christ free course within the necessities and challenges of the devastating results of the evil of this present age: the Third World poor, the off-scourings of our modern 'enlightened' civilisation. In this light we gladly echo the words of Gutierrez.
>
> [We need to be] conscious of the always critical and creative character of the liberating message of the gospel: a message that does not identify itself with any social form, no matter how just it may seem to us in a given moment, but which always speaks from the stance of the poor and which asks of us a very concrete solidarity in the present of our situation and our capacity to analyse it, even at the risk of being mistaken (1979:208).

I suggest that the "concrete solidarity" demanded by our South African situation calls for a relationship between radical evangelicals and liberationists in which speaking "from the stance of the poor" will be the most significant component.

I see three implications which follow from this discussion of theologies of liberation.

(1) A sharp dichotomy between evangelical theology (especially in its radical form) and liberation theology is a false dichotomy. To suggest that to be evangelical is to hold to a theological position which in principle excludes liberationist perspectives is misleading. It is most unhelpful to project a picture of the two theologies as in essence being incompatible. Variations in both suggest that finely drawn lines of distinction between them fail to reflect the dynamics of a relationship in which liberationist themes appear in some evangelical theologies and evangelical themes in some liberation theologies.

(2) Taking a preferential option for the poor creates a oneness between radical evangelicals and liberationists. If this option is seen as a central feature in both theologies and a key factor shaping their identities, then a unity of perspective exists which implies that radical evangelicals and liberationists are far closer to one another than is often imagined. The argument of this thesis makes an option for the poor a key determinant for radical evangelical theology and in so doing opens the way for a close alignment (though separate identities still exist) with all other theologies which can be seen as theologies of the oppressed. If the term "theology of liberation" is used to designate a contextual theology articulated from the perspective of oppressed people in which the praxis of faith is essential for doing theology, then the theology being formulated in this thesis is a theology of liberation.

(3) In contexts of oppression (such as South Africa), radical evangelicals and liberationists often find they have a natural affinity. Such radicals then discover a closer bond with those who follow a liberation perspective than they have with conservative evangelicals. This suggests that a unity produced by a common commitment to the poor and their cause in society is more significant than a unity which depends on affirming so-called evangelical distinctives. While radical evangelicals, as we have already seen, make affirmations which give them an evangelical identity, this identity is, I believe, of less ultimate significance than a discipleship commitment involving an option for the poor. Therefore, so-called evangelical unity cannot for radical evangelicals transcend barriers created by hierachical forms of theology through which many conservatives opt for the rich and powerful over against the poor and oppressed. This often results in the marginalizing of radicals from the evangelical establishment and their discovery of a deeper fellowship with those who share a common commitment to the poor and their liberation.

6. Concluding Word

In this chapter we have looked at the challenge that an evangelical contextual theology of the poor poses to the a-contextual traditional models of interpretation. This has been followed by an explication of the contextual alternative to these models, an interactionist appraoch. Some of the issues raised by this approach have also been discussed.

In concluding this chapter its overall implication may be summarized as follows. By its emphasis on interpretation from the stance of the poor the theology developing in this thesis challenges not only a-historical models of Western interpretation, but also the influence they exert in forming theologies which neglect the socio-political dimensions of faith. This has particular relevance in the South African context where these imported conservative theologies lead to evangelical models of thought which tend to support the system and its oppressive influence. For this inclination to be combated, a new form of theological thinking is needed. The paradigm shift called for by this situation is one which in essence involves moving from a view taken from above to a view taken from below. In the alternative hermeneutic proposed in this chapter the underlying argument is that its contextual character is controlled by the perspective of reading from the underside. It is not merely the cultural necessity of gaining knowledge within a context that is in view. It is the perception that a certain position (that of the poor) influences understanding to bring it into conformity with that way of knowing which is implied in the incarnation of Jesus. Here the theology expounded in the previous chapter finds expression in the method discussed in this one and in so doing challenges the methodology of mainline Western evangelicalism.

NOTES

1 Of this theology as expressed by leaders at the turn of the century he says; "They hid the gospel behind a wall of doctrinal certainties, theological catchwords, devotional prescriptions, and obvious self-justifications, all of which informed the reader of exactly what he or she would find in the pages of the Bible before the book was even opened making it much less probable that the Word might be a surprise" (1986:viii-ix).

2 The Baptist Convention is the predominantly black Baptist body which exists alongside the predominantly white Baptist Union of Southern Africa. Until recently it was attached as a General Association to the Baptist Union and engaged in discussions aimed to lead to a merger of the two bodies. Near the end of 1987 it withdrew from Associational membership and decided to discontinue merger discussions. Unlike the Baptist Union it is related to the SACC as an observer member.

3 The question of the nature of the gospel has already, in part, been addressed in my chapter on the identity of the poor. Further development of this theme will be offered in the final chapter.

4 The theology of the poor reflected in this thesis (and particularly in this chapter) tends to emphasize the concrete over the abstract, the subjective over the objective, the relative over the absolute. This emphasis is not intended to deny abstract, objective or absolute realities, but rather to correct an overemphasis in this direction by the conservative community. My concern is not to philosophize about the nature of reality, but to propose a theological formulation which will empower evangelicals, particularly those part of the oppressed community, to cope with the South African social crisis. In this emphasis the dualism implicit in the conservative evangelical constituency is denied. Part of this dualism is reflected, I believe, in its tendency to sharply divide between some of the categories mentioned above and make these divisions touchstones for understanding. I doubt whether, for instance, the sharp division between absolute and relative has much value for understanding, given the fact that we only know within a prescribed historical framework. In any case, reflection of this nature tends to be purely speculative, which only adds to the abtractness of reflection and separation between thought and life. I have no problem affirming the existence of absolute reality expressed in the existence of an infinite God, but I question the value or necessity of a strong emphasis on this perspective, given the fact that the purpose of interpretation is the incarnation of Jesus' thought and action rather than static propositional statements. In any case, an emphasis on the categories in question reflects a Western way of thinking and is at best only one way of looking at reality.

5 The use of the expression "the bible is a blueprint for life" is an example of how peoples' thinking is influenced by the categories of the world they live in, and how they borrow from these. This is, of course, unavoidable and a perfectly normal way of formulating reality. It can become very misleading however, when a formal correspondence is made between the biblical text and the paradigms of thought people imbibe from their context. This is often done.

The bible is freely spoken of as a blueprint for life *as if this were actually what the text says.*

6 Perhaps this statement needs to be modified by some of the developments in Latin America which point towards the bible functioning more directly as the source of the people's struggle. This is seen particularly among the Roman Catholic Base Church Communities in Brazil. A report on a visit to Brazil in August and September 1988 by Gunter Wittenberg of the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, offers the assessment of a deepening of liberation theology with a strong emphasis on bible study and spirituality developing. This report concerning the visit to CEDI (*Centro Ecumenico de Documentacao e Informacao)* in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo reflects the way in which the Catholic base communities read the bible as a book of the poor and says that in this context "the Bible is the most important support in the people's struggle for liberation".

7 I do not regard these remarks concerning "starting point" as contradictory of the arguments advanced earlier in this chapter. Here the usage contrasts the difference between locating the controlling norm for theology in scripture or in historical praxis. In the earlier argument the contrast was between a theology in which the influence of context on interpretation is recognized and one in which it is not.

CHAPTER SIX

HOLISTIC GOSPEL: A CHALLENGE TO INDIVIDUALISM AND DUALISM

In the previous chapter the challenge of contextualization was discussed. Here evangelical methodology was confronted by an alternative epistemology and hermeneutic. In this chapter it is the missiology of evangelicalism that will be examined and challenged by the holistic character of this radical evangelical theology.

The term "holistic" is used to indicate a basic relatedness which unites elements too often considered opposites. It is used in a functional rather than strictly philosophical sense and is seen as the opposite of atomistic and dualistic tendencies to divide and fragment. Its usage reflects an understanding of the gospel in which sharp divisions between spiritual and material, individual and communal concerns are denied, and an integral connection between them is affirmed. It sees the purpose of the gospel to bring wholeness and oneness in a divided and alienated world.

The theology developing in this thesis is essentially a theology of the poor. This, in the various ways in which it has been expressed, is its fundamental character. The two major aspects of this theology of the poor are seen in its contextual and holistic nature. It is in these two respects that it challenges the dominant evangelical tradition. The challenge posed by its contextual character has already been considered. It is now our task to address the challenge posed by its holistic character.

1. Commitment to the Poor and Holistic Gospel

In chapter three I mentioned the historical association between taking an option for the poor and holistic emphases. The events following Lausanne 1974 signalled the development of a movement of

holistic evangelism among evangelicals. Of significance is the way this went hand in hand with a growing emphasis on the poor. Some of the materials reflecting the history of this period cited in that chapter support this view that these two perspectives belong together.

Orlando Costas has seen the same relatedness between concern for the poor and a holistic gospel emphasis among Latin American Catholics and Protestants and their Hispanic counterparts in North America. He speaks of them having "experienced authentic spiritual awakening. This experience can be described as a rediscovery of the personal and social dimensions of the gospel". He goes on to say that "What has led to this experience of spiritual renewal is what Esther and Mortimer Arias have described as `the discovery of the poor' and the concomitant rediscovery of the gospel" (1989:13). Costas later comments:

> ...in discovering the powerless and the oppressed (i.e. those who have been locked out of history or treated as outsiders and considered nonpersons) as the privileged addressees of the gospel, Latin American Christians have also experienced the gospel as life and joy in an environment of death and misery. Indeed, it is among the poor and disenfranchised of the world that by and large (though by no means exclusively) we find the signs of the presence of the new world promised in the gospel (the personal and social experience of love and freedom, justice and peace) in ways that, if small and provisional, are historically concrete (1989:14-15).

A similar connection between responding to the poor and discovering the full meaning of the gospel is seen by Michael Paget-Wilkes. Writing from a British perspective he speaks of the "contradiction of Christianity" in the distinction

> ...between Jesus' identification with the poor, the suffering and the oppressed, and the way the church exists today,....Only when the *corporate* body of Christ faces and responds to poverty, injustice and inequality, will the full implications of Christ's message be understood. And in facing such a major contradiction the whole church might well find a key that unlocks a new understanding of what the Christian faith is all about (1981:6).

These observations clearly indicate a close connection between an understanding shaped by the situation of the poor and the discovery of a gospel that powerfully affects life in all its dimensions. Very clearly a theology of the poor deeply affects the way in which Christian mission is perceived. Because it proceeds from the underside of history and opts for the victims of social conflict it is incompatible with views which separate historical situations from spiritual experience. Its historically concrete character means that it cannot be the vehicle of a message which tells of a divine love which touches people in their souls but has no reference to their social and political existence.

To speak in holistic terms is also to speak contextually, for the message that applies to all of life is a message that has regard to the historical situation of those it addresses. Thus we can say that the gospel as a holistic message relates directly to its contextual nature which in turn relates it to the poor. Clearly, this developing theology cannot be a theology of the poor without at the same time being both contextual and holistic. These three strands intertwine and are not easily separated. Speaking of the contextual nature of evangelization and pointing to it as a message relating to all of life as well as proceeding from the situation of the poor Orlando Costas has said:

> The gospel cannot be shared in a sociocultural vacuum. It is not a message without a social referent. Indeed, the gospel revolves around the divine condescension in the most precarious situations of human reality. This implies that if the gospel needs to be proclaimed contextually, it is no less essential that it be located in the most vulnerable point of each situation. To maintain its theological integrity and historical efficacy, evangelization needs to be undertaken from below - that is from the depth of suffering, where we find both sinners and victims of sin (1989:31).

The connection between commitment to the poor and holistic thought may be expressed in the following way. Where a theology of the poor develops, particularly within a Western evangelical setting, a paradigm shift occurs. This involves a movement from accustomed hierachical patterns of thought (involving as we noted in chapter

four a "top down" theology) to a perspective where reality is viewed from the underside. An essential part of this paradigm shift involves a movement from dualistic to holistic ways of thinking. This may be understood as an integral part of the shift from top-down models of thought, that aspect which affirms the wholeness of life and denies the dualistic tendencies of Western evangelical thinking.

My own experience, observation, and research indicates a pattern of change where for Western conservative evangelicals (and for third world evangelicals influenced by thought forms imported from the West) a switch to holistic ways of thinking precedes commitment to the poor. This is borne out by the developments following Lausanne 1974 where the new movement of change among evangelicals was primarily what Vinay Samuel has called a "movement for integral evangelism" (Samuel, Hauser 1989:10). Chronologically, conversion from conservative to radical forms of evangelical understanding may be seen to proceed as follows. An awakening to socio-political realities and their relationship to Christian faith leads on to the growth of holistic perspectives in which a more integrated view of discipleship, mission, and evangelism emerges. This in turn, by its intrinsically contextual implications, leads to a special concern for the poor, which can and in some cases does lead to the paradigm shift already mentioned.

While this process may in broad terms describe the experience of Western radical evangelicals (and some from third world contexts), it needs to be affirmed that the heart of the conversion depicted here does not lie either in its holistic or contextual character, but rather in the more fundamental change to understanding the gospel from the underside of history. It is the theology of the poor involving, as we have seen in a previous chapter, this radical switch of perspective which constitutes the essence of the conversion in view. It is a theology formulated from the position of the oppressed which in principle is more fundamental to this change than either contextual method or holistic mission. I see this because while it may be possible to be contextual in method (on a

cultural level), and holistic in mission practice (without giving priority to the poor), it is almost impossible to conceive a theology of the poor, as depicted in this thesis, existing without contextual method and holistic missiology. It is for this reason that contextual and holistic categories are specially highlighted as implications emerging from a theology of the poor in this thesis rather than vice versa. The structural order which places these two elements at the conclusion of the argument is not accidental. They are seen as outgrowths of the central theology of the poor, integral aspects which challenge the a-historical methodology and dualistic missiology of the dominant evangelical tradition.

2. Challenge to Individualism and Dualism

We have already noted in a previous chapter that individualism and dualism are closely allied. In simplest terms they represent that approach common among conservative evangelicals where an almost exclusive emphasis is placed on the spiritual needs of individuals with little attention being paid to their context.

Individualism brings a divorce between the person and the life situation or the community. It isolates the individual for attention as a being whose needs can be fulfilled irrespective of the situation in which he or she is found. Its effect is to abstract people from their social environment, to foster the idea that people can be little islands of well-being in the midst of the ills of the world. Though the surroundings may be deplored and even be a focus of some concern, they do not ultimately matter as long as individuals are having their needs met. Thus a basic disjunction between the person and her or his social setting is fostered.

In dualism there is a divorce in the person's world view between the spiritual and material. These two realms are separated with priority being given to spiritual concerns which are focussed on in theology often to the virtual exclusion of material and social needs. This emphasis is not seen as divorcing what should be held

together, but rather as "putting first things first". Its basic assumption is that the spiritual needs of individuals are so important that even if their social needs are never addressed, what really matters will have taken place if their spiritual needs are met. An example of this is a statement I heard in an evangelical sermon in which the preacher said: "The distinctive message of Christianity is that the spiritual is more important than the physical. The spiritual must take precedence over the material".1 Through this kind of emphasis a basic disjunction between spiritual and material concerns is encouraged.

The terms individualism and dualism are used together in this thesis because of their close connection in traditional evangelical thought. It may be said that the challenge that a theology of the poor presents is one addressed to individualism-dualism, the approach of the conservative community in which emphasis is placed on individuals in isolation from their contexts and spiritual concerns in isolation from material concerns. The terms are used in a popular rather than a technical sense. Their usage is not intended to undermine the significance either of individuals or spiritual concerns and values. It is unwarranted and harmful separation that is addressed while the value of individual persons and the importance of spirituality is strongly affirmed. Underlying the use and selection of these two categories is the view that they well describe and summarize an existing situation within the conservative evangelical community. This will become more apparent as this chapter proceeds.

2.1. Separation between the Individual and the Community

In an earlier chapter we noted the words of Vinay Samuel: "We have failed to understand this perspective (of the gospel of the poor) because we have narrowed the focus of the formulation of the gospel and the context of the faith to individuals" (Sugden 1988:448). In this observation Samuel uncovers a basic flaw in individualism. It is a narrowing of focus to the concerns of individuals which shuts

out holistic perspectives which give the gospel relevance to life particularly as it is experienced by poor people. The problem with such individualism is that through such narrowing of focus it separates the individual from the community and promotes an inadequate and unhelpful view of human society.

In Western evangelical theology society is too often seen merely as the aggregate of individuals (Sugden 1988:452). People exist essentially as individuals and society tends to become merely an extension of this. Thus the biblical view which strongly emphasizes the community as a whole is denied. "According to biblical doctrine, the person is truly human only as a member of a group" (Mott 1982:119). The value expressed in the African concept of *ubuntu* provides a view of society more in keeping with the biblical vision. This conveys the idea that "a person is a person by means of other people" and "suggests that one's own humanness depends upon recognizing the humanity of others and their recognizing yours" (Wilson and Ramphele 1989:269). This human inter-relatedness supplies a view of society more conducive to communal consciousness and social involvement than the individualism of the Western view. This, no doubt, is one reason why within a South African context black evangelicals seem less prone to individualism-dualism than do their white counterparts.

2.1.1. Separation between Personal and Social Relationships

An example of the way such social individualism affects biblical interpretation is seen in the exposition by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones of Matthew 5:38-42 where Jesus speaks of not resisting evil and turning the other cheek.

> ...this teaching, which concerns the Christian individual and nobody else, applies to him only in his personal relationships and not in his relationships as a citizen of his country. This is the whole crux of the teaching....our Lord's teaching concerns the behaviour of the Christian in his personal relationships only; indeed, in this saying, the Christian's relationship to the State is not even considered or mentioned. Here we have nothing

> but the reaction of the Christian as an individual to the things that are done to him personally (1959:277).

The presupposition behind this statement is that personal relationships can be abstracted from social relationships and the Christian can have a life "as an individual" which is in some sense different from his or her life as a citizen. I suggest that to think in these terms is to lean heavily on notions derived from Western individualism. It is questionable whether it would have occurred to Jesus with his Hebrew holistic background to think in these categories and make these distinctions. The point is not (as Lloyd-Jones argues) that personal family relationships for instance are different from relationships to the state and therefore "All these are quite apart from my general relationship to the country to which I belong" (1959:277). The point is that his argument depends on a view of society in which people's various relationships can be so isolated from each other that responsibility in one capacity can be separated from responsibility in another capacity. This divisive view implies that, as some have argued, a Christian in some capacities is obliged to act only in obedience to the authorities as a citizen and not in accordance with the dictates of Christ's kingdom.2 I doubt, though, that Lloyd-Jones would argue for this, but his line of reasoning leads toward it.

A problem with individualism is that it involves a privatized form of faith whose role is limited to the personal concerns of the believer. This results in the absence of a social dimension to faith and leads to Christian endorsement (at least implicitly) of unjust and oppressive social structures.

Writing of the individualism of South African Baptists which contrasts with the sense of community of their Anabaptist forebears, Louise Kretzschmar has said:

> As long as they are free to preach their personal gospel and worship a God who is Lord of the individual soul, many Baptists envisage no need to challenge the state, even if this state acts against other members of the Christian church who challenge its abuse of authority. Consequently, Baptists have subjected themselves, as in-

> dividuals and as churches, to the dictates of the rulers in a way that their Anabaptist forebears certainly did not. It would seem that, for many Baptists, the Free Church principle for which many Anabaptists died has been emasculated and restricted to the freedom to preach a personal salvation and the individual's right to be part of a divine kingdom that has little to say or do in this world (1989:110-111).

Writing about a similar form of individualism among Latin American conservative evangelicals Emilio Nunez has said:

> Our message has not been a threat to people in the wealthy class, in government, in the military. We conservative evangelicals in Latin America are known as "good people" because we do not interfere in political affairs, and do not make the people aware of their total need of liberation. Dictators have loved us and protected us for almost a century, in Central America, because of our non-involvemnent in politics. Of course, our non-involvement has been a political option, by which we have contributed to the preservation of the status quo in Latin American society (Hanks 1983:144).

2.1.2. Spiritual Change and Social Change

One aspect of evangelical individualism is seen in the oft-repeated view that spiritual change inevitably produces social change. Here the assumption is that if only there could be a revival of evangelical religion and multitudes of people were born again this of itself would bring about the renewal of society and the removal of injustice. This implies that the greatest social reform is produced through distinctly spiritual means rather than through direct social action. Billy Graham has expressed this in his words: "If the Church went back to its main task of proclaiming the gospel and people converted to Christ, it would have a far greater impact on the social, moral, and psychological needs of men than it could achieve through any other thing it could possibly do" (Padilla, Sugden 1985:6). Mott responds to this idea of social change through evangelism by acknowledging its element of truth, that is that inward change does affect one's social relationships, but goes on to identify its weakness. "The difficulty with this position is

that it sees influence flowing in only one direction. This places undue emphasis on the character of the individual to the neglect of the structures of society" (1982:119). This is a position which reflects a basically individualistic view of society. In "its reliance upon individual change" it "ignores the objective reality of social life and social evil" (Mott 1982:120).

The fallacy of this position becomes apparent when the socio-political involvement of evangelical Christians is considered. Experience of the evangelical community teaches that "conversion" is often confined to the spiritual realm, when it comes to socio-political concerns many zealous, pious evangelicals are decidedly "unconverted", and often strongly opposed to all efforts to produce social change. Within the South African context it certainly may be stated that evangelicals as a community are not an example of social commitment which arises spontaneously from gospel preaching. Experience indicates that it just does not work this way. Relating this experience to the Indian situation, Vinay Samuel has quoted a church leader in Nagaland, North East India as saying:

> One of the barriers for evangelism among us is that we are one of the most corrupt states in India. 80% of us are Christians, yet corruption is rife...We have separated spiritual transformation from transformation in society. We have separated off the individual from the community. We believe that if we have got spiritual transformation, all other transformation of relationships will automatically follow. And it just does not work (Sugden 1988:293).

The history of social transformation certainly denies the contention that apparently successful efforts to promote spiritual renewal of themselves lead to social renewal. Reformers like William Wilbeforce and Martin Luther King Jnr. did a great deal more than proclaim a gospel of individual salvation. Social structural changes involving the repealing of unjust laws have involved the stirring of social conscience and mobilizing of public action. These may not produce personal righteousness, but they certainly act to restrain evil in the public sphere and protect oppressed people from exploitation, which preaching of individual salvation

on its own does not accomplish. In a heated debate at the Berlin Congress on Evangelism in 1966, a black Detroit Baptist, Louis Johnson said that the "law did for me and my people in America what empty and high-powered evangelical preaching never did for one hundred years" (Padilla, Sugden 1985b:7).

In comparing the social attitudes of theological liberals and conservatives Daniel Stevick has pointed to the way in which events have proved the fallacy of the claim that evangelism as such produces social reform.

> If the fathers of Liberalism warned that an individualistic, pietistic message, unrelated to the great political, social, and ideological issues of the day, was as good as no message at all, events have certainly proved them far more right than those who assumed that the impassioned proclamation of an individual salvation would solve racial, economic, and international tensions (1964:39).

In challenging the assumption that evangelism produces social change it needs to be affirmed that personal transformation is not irrelevant to social transformation, for individual and social renewal do belong together and should not be separated. It is simply not true, however, that spiritual renewal (as conceived and exemplified by multitudes of evangelicals) by itself *automatically* produces social renewal. Experience denies this. If spiritual change is to lead towards social change then a holistic approach is necessary in which the life of the whole person is shaped by the vision of society revealed in God's new order of the kingdom, and in which the concerns of the individual are not allowed to exist in isolation from the concerns of the community.

2.2. The Spiritual-Material Division

Michael Paget-Wilkes has spoken of the dualistic approach as one of the results of the church's option to stand on the side of wealth and power in society. He adds:

> The church has accepted the concept of dualism - that life is divided into body and soul; matter and spirit and that these two aspects can be kept separate. But such a division leads to inadequate interpretations of the Gospel. For as long as faith can be divorced from reality the demand for the church to face the facts of human existence, is unheard (1981:44-45).

By facing the facts of human existence Wilkes' is speaking particularly of the reality that "the vast majority of the world's population...live only just above starvation level" (1981:45). By dualistic emphases the social challenge of poverty and oppression is evaded. This is a situation characteristic of mainline evangelicalism where very often the preaching of the gospel relates only to the saving of "souls" and has no reference whatever to material existence.

2.2.1. Division between Inner and Outer Realms

Vinay Samuel has seen a similar connection between the church's inclination to take the wrong socio-political stances and its dualistic tendency to divide the spiritual from the material. He asks: "Why has the church not been marked by the socio-economic and political stances of discipleship?" Part of the reason, he says may lie in "a particular way of reading the scriptures which divorces Christian experience and discipleship into inner and outer realms" (1981:54). Samuel describes dualism as a sharp distinction between inner and outer realms and also as a separation between vertical and horizontal relationships.

> We suggest that one reason why people assign this sort of priority to man's vertical relationship is that they have dualistic understanding of existence assuming that man lives in two realms, an inner realm and an outer realm...the inner realm is the locus of the vertical relationship with God. It is a realm of unchanging spiritual realities within which people immediately apprehend God. Here God meets man face to face. It is a realm of religion, ideas, concepts and language. This realm can only be experienced individually. There is no "corporate" inner realm. Entrance into the life of this realm is through receiving words and responding to ideas and concepts. The outer realm is the locus of horizontal

> relationships with man. It is the realm of physical and material existence. Anything that occurs in the outer realm is a consequence of prior activity in the inner realm. The outer realm cannot be acted on directly, it can be truly changed only by activity in the inner realm (Sugden 1988:352).

This is an interesting description of dualism. It indicates certain fundamental divisions which affect human experience.

(1) There is a basic distinction between life in the spiritual and life in the physical realm. The experience of God is tied to the inner realm whereas experience in the world is tied to the outer realm. The effect of this form of thought is to move material, social and political aspects of life out of the orbit of God's influence. It is the opposite of a holistic understanding where material existence is part of the whole, all of which relates to God.

(2) A sharp division is also made between individual experience and corporate experience. God can only be known on the individual level. Access to him is denied except through the channel of personal inner experiences undergone by separate individuals. This means that concepts of God's direct action in society are denied. What happens in society (communal outer experience) is determined by what happens within people (individual inner experience). There is a decidedly one way flow of influence from within persons out to society with no acknowledgement of the counter flow from the outer environment to the inner world of experience. The effect of this structure of thought is seen in the kind of individualism discussed in the previous section. This exclusive inner focus goes hand in hand with a dichotomy between the individual and the community. Thus individualism (separation between the individual and the community) and dualism (separation between the inner and the outer realm) are seen to be closely allied. The two separations naturally go together.

(3) This description of Samuel's also implies a clear distinction between the way in which spiritual change takes place and the way

in which social change takes place. Spiritual change is the result of the direct inner action of God. Social change (where it is envisaged and assuming it is beneficial) is the result of the prior inner spiritual action of God and is dependent on it. It is immediately apparent that this form of dualistic thinking naturally produces the view already considered, that social change occurs through spiritual change.

In my view there is little doubt that the restriction, the reduction, and often the exclusion of social involvement in the life of conservative evangelicals is largely due to the kind of dualism outlined by Vinay Samuel. This dualism may not often be expressed in these precise terms, nor are its implications often recognized, but it is a hidden factor which shapes the social thought and behaviour of evangelicals and a major contributor to what I see as a distortion in their views of social action. It is a perspective which is incompatible with the holistic theology of the poor which this thesis advances and is challenged by it.

The kind of dualism under discussion appears to be a particular problem among Westerners, or those influenced by Western patterns of thought. In speaking of the evangelical issue of the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility William Pannell has remarked:

> The dichotomous nature of this issue is more Western than non-Western. John Mbiti speaks of the effect of Western either/or thinking among the churches in Africa, separating things which should be together and putting together things which should be separated. Members of the Anglo evangelical community in North America continue to have problems overcoming this cultural bias, while members of the African-American community do not. In all the history of the church in the Black community in the United States there is little evidence of this dichotomy (1989:204).

2.2.2. A Spiritual not a Social Message

This particularly Western problem may be seen to be related to the influence of Greek patterns of thought in the history of the church. It has shown itself, especially among theological conservatives, as an inclination to focus on spiritual concerns to the neglect of social concerns. The existence of this problem is epitomized in the idea that the message people need is one whose focus is exclusively spiritual. Any social reference is additional and not a necessary part of the message itself. Indeed, the introduction of social aspects is often seen to distract from the primary purpose of promoting the spiritual welfare of people. This approach has led to a preaching and teaching emphasis entirely oriented to spiritual concerns where social reference is omitted in favour of concentration on what are conceived as the most important issues.

One example of this approach is seen in George Whitfield the English evangelist. James Armstrong has written of him that he

> ...was the most widely travelled evangelist of the Weslyan revival in the eighteenth century. He was equally famous on both sides of the Atlantic. From 1738 to 1770 he made seven journeys to America....He knew the colonies as few others did and was one of the first unifying forces drawing them together. It is said that 80 percent of the people in the America of that day had heard him preach. Yet so far as we know George Whitfield never uttered a single word against human slavery (1981:31).

A reading of Whitfield's sermons reveals an overwhelming emphasis on the need for spiritual rebirth and renewal which does not explicitly impinge on the social sphere. In this he differed from John Wesley who spoke out strongly against slavery and also from the nineteenth century revivalist Charles Finney who in his day also made opposition to slavery a significant theme in his preaching and teaching. In the history of evangelicalism in Europe and America it is the model of Whitfield rather than that of Wesley and Finney which has been followed. Despite an awakening to social concern, especially following Lausanne 1974, the Western evangeli-

cal community is still marked by a general dualistic character in which preaching and teaching with a strong social content is the exception rather than the rule.

This kind of exclusively spiritual emphasis is the result of a dualism which so emphasizes peoples' spiritual needs that these are separated from their social needs and treated in isolation from them. Social issues are avoided because they are seen to create a barrier to the realization of the spiritual objective. Stephen Mott has written of a Baptist leader Jimmy Allen who

> ...was chided for a strong statement on racial injustice. "When you as a Baptist preacher get into that kind of controversy, you cut off my chance as a Baptist to win my neighbor who has racial prejudice". Allen's response is appropriate. "Evangelism is not tricking people into signing the policy and then letting them read the small print". Evangelism is the proclamation that God's reign has broken into history; the nature of the rule of God cannot be removed from the proclamation (1982:125).

Mott's comment is very apposite. It highlights the key issue here which concerns the content of gospel proclamation. The reason why gospel preaching cannot be purely spiritual-divorced-from-social-emphasis is that the message to be proclaimed is essentially holistic (relating to all of life) and not dualistic (purely a spiritual in contrast to a material concern). The nature of the kingdom which relates to God's order for all of human life is an essential of Christian proclamation. Something of this same vision is reflected in the words of Orlando Costas.

> The church ought not to forgo any opportunity to work for world peace and Christian unity. The argument that in working towards these goals the church may divert its energies from its primary task of evangelization constitutes a basic misunderstanding of the heart of the gospel and a lack of appreciation of the seventh beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called (children) of God" (Matt. 5:9). Working for world peace and Christian unity is a mark of the church. If it is true that the best credentials the church has in its evangelistic witness is the way in which it lives the gospel, then if the church fails to work for its own unity and the unity of the world, it denies its essence and thus renders itself incapable of bearing witness to the gospel (1989:86).

Holistic interpretations such as those provided by Mott and Costas contradict the dualism which abstracts spiritual reality from other human reality and deny the notion that authentic Christian life and proclamation is consistent with this two-tier arrangement. A theology of the poor in its holistic character provides an alternative gospel formulation to these Western-based understandings which are reflective more of Greek dualism than the holistic Hebrew perspectives reflected in scripture.

2.2.3. A Domesticated Gospel

One particularly harmful result of dualism is its inclination to domesticate the gospel. By this I refer to the tendency to so impose Western type distinctions on the interpretation of the gospel that it becomes in effect "our kind of gospel". In this form it is often exported from the West and used for the advancement of Western cultural norms and Western interests. This misuse of the gospel becomes possible, I believe, through a dualism which allows the spiritual component to be separated from social concerns and thereby robs the gospel of the capacity to act as a judge of oppressive structures. Referring to this tendency Costas has said:

> Christians who participate in the modern missionary movement do so, by and large, out of a sincere commitment to Jesus Christ and the Christian missionary mandate. Nevertheless they are part of a worldwide system that often uses people, movements and institutions for purposes other than the communication of the gospel and its liberating power....The simple fact is that the missionary movement has been supported economically by women, men, and agencies committed to the so-called free-enterprise system and its liberal capitalist ideology (1982:66).

This fact, according to Costas, is reflected in the "domesticating role" that "Christian world mission - insofar as it is an entrepreneurial force - has played in the last five hundred years" (1982:67). This domestication (particularly in the promotion of Western norms as synonymous with Christian norms), has involved an

imperialistic approach in which a domesticated gospel has been used to domesticate foreign people and create them over again in a Western image.3 The fact that this has been possible when missionaries have acted with an undoubted motivation to advance the gospel of Christ, is due largely, I believe, to the degree to which dualistic concepts have been allowed to rob the gospel of its social power. Through such dualism the function of the gospel as a liberating force has been denied and instead it has become a domesticating force. "We were given", says Thomas Cullinan, "a Gospel that was a wild tiger, we tame it and domesticate it into a pussy cat" (Sheila Cassidy 1977:309).

2.3 Dichotomy between Nature and Grace

The basic idea of a division between spirit and matter is not the only way in which dualism may be described. This division can also be extended to include the way in which God's activity is perceived. Thus the concept emerges that a distinction needs to be made between God's action in nature as creator and his action in grace as redeemer. In an earlier chapter this was noted in a reference to different evangelical bases for social action in the concept of creation or the kingdom, and the dualistic tendency to divide sharply between creation and covenant was mentioned. The inclination to discriminate clearly between these two aspects of God's activity stems, I believe, from dualistic ways of thinking and has a detrimental effect on evangelical social theology. It proposes a restriction of the application of God's grace to the sphere of the church and therefore severely limits any perception of the work of God outside the church.

It is linked as well to individualistic notions of God's activity which exclude the possibility of direct divine action in the world (except of course for God's general providential control) apart from personal experience of God's grace through which Christians acts as God's agents in society. Sugden has written: "According to Samuel one reason why evangelicals fail to deal adequately with the

work of God outside the church is that they view redemption, and the work of God and the church in individual categories while society is organised in corporate and impersonal categories" (1988:312).

This creation-based view of social action is a perspective reflected in the Lausanne Covenant.4 Item 5 in the Covenant speaks of "Christian Social Responsibility". In this item social responsibility is clearly related to God's action as creator. It commences with the words; "We affirm that God is both Creator and Judge of all men" (Lausanne Covenant 1975:4). This is significant for the terms in which this item is formulated clearly support a distinction between God's action in creation and redemption. Conceiving social responsibility as an aspect of God's redeeming action in the world, if not explicitly denied in this item, is discouraged by the wording: "Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation" (1975:4). The inclusion of this disclaimer shows a desire to keep the concept of individual salvation separate from that of social action, salvation being a work of grace and social action a work of nature or creation.

A particular example of this thinking is John Stott. He has written of those he sees as confusing socio-political liberation and salvation as being guilty of a theological confusion which "is to mix what Scripture keeps distinct - God the Creator and God the Redeemer, the God of the cosmos and the God of the covenant, the world and the church, common grace and saving grace, justice and justification, the reformation of society and the regeneration of men "(1975:95).

Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, in an essay on the theology of social change have criticized this creation-based theology of Stott. He is quoted as saying: "God the creator is constantly active in his world in providence, in common grace and in judgment, quite apart from the purposes for which he has sent his Son, his Spirit and his church into the world" (Samuel, Sugden 1981b:51). Samuel

and Sugden see this as indicating that "The redemptive work of Christ is limited to where Christ is consciously acknowledged and that can be only in the church". This implies that "since the acknowledgement of Christ is always required for any true social change, evangelism always has a priority". Some evangelicals, particularly in the third world, find this kind of theology "inadequate for grappling with the burning issues of social change and struggle between the weak and the strong" (Samuel, Sugden 1981b:51).

For Samuel and Sugden this creation-based theology is defective because "it is divorced from redemption, from the eschatalogical recapitulation of all things in Christ which has been inaugurated at his coming". They give three criticisms of the effects of this theology. First, it gives no basis for identifying or participating in the "struggle between the weak and the strong". Second, its "bias is for preserving the created order while the real task of redemption takes place on the 'spiritual' level. This...tends to help the status quo" for God comes to be identified, as author of the created order, with it. Third, it inclines to dualism:

> ...since the real sphere of God's activity is the spiritual sphere, creation and the created can be lower on the Christian agenda than it should be. Christian activity and action are directed more towards the expansion of the church. Costly involvement in issues of struggle which might hamper numerical growth is often missing from the church's witness (1981b:51-52).

Following this critique Samuel and Sugden argue for a biblically based theology which recognizes the "application of the redemptive work of God in Christ to the world outside the church" (1981b:52). The following are three of their arguments.

(1) They speak of the kingdom of God having a scope which "extends not just to the community of the King that consciously acknowledges Jesus as Lord, but is also seen in God's kingdom activity in the world beyond the church". God's kingdom speaks of just relationships which need to be established in society.

> These just relationships are seen in Jesus' own ministry, as he announces the kingdom as good news to the poor, as he declares that the bias of the kingdom is to invite the outcast and the oppressed to the king's feast, as he castigates the religious leaders for ignoring justice, as he gives priority to the poor, sick and oppressed in his ministry (1981b:52-53).

I find it significant that Samuel and Sugden start with the theme of the kingdom. This is, I believe, the key issue in this debate concerning creation and redemption. If the view of the kingdom they propose can be sustained then it follows that barriers to the application of God's redemptive work in the world outside the church are broken down and the foundation of social action is no longer limited to creation-based motivations.

(2) In addressing the theme of the world Samuel and Sugden affirm that "God has a purpose for the world outside the church in his plan of redemption. If his plan of redemption is being put into partial effect now, that redemption could be at work in the world beyond the church" (1981b:53).

(3) In speaking of God at work in Christ they pose the pertinent theological question

> ...whether God works in the world at present apart from what he has shown of himself in Christ. Does God work on the basis of Christ's death and resurrection only in the church? Has the victory of Christ over sin, evil and death in his cross and resurrection no implications for the way God works in the world as a whole outside the church (1981b:53)?

They argue that if the effects of Christ's victory are restricted to where it is acknowledged then this means that his working in the world is unrelated to the victory of Christ in the cross. This kind of disjunction in the way God's activity is understood is clearly unaccepatable to Samuel and Sugden.

> If...God's whole work in the world is related to the death and resurrection of Christ, we may look for the pattern of redemption at work where God is at work beyond the church. We can say that God does more than preserve and judge the world outside the church; he works to

> change it into conformity to his redemption plan (1981b:54).

In selecting these three themes from the list of arguments advanced by Samuel and Sugden sufficient evidence has been provided to show that there is reason to support the idea of God's redemptive action outside of the church on biblical grounds.5 In summary they say:

> We therefore see from these themes that a biblical case can be made for regarding the work of Christ beyond the church as not fundamentally inferior to his work in the church. Its basis is the same, the victory of Christ on the cross and in his resurrection. Its goal is the same, the creation of a new humanity in Christ which openly acknowledges him as Lord....We suggest that such a process can be seen in some of the struggles for social change in the Third World, where the weak are seeking full human dignity in struggle with the strong (1981b:60).

This material from Samuel and Sugden has been considered at some length because it constitutes a clear challenge to the majority evangelical social view represented in the influential Lausanne Covenant. The issue raised in this debate is a holistic one. Is God's activity in the world best represented by models of thought which focus on dualistic or holistic emphases? Should we view history as fundamentally divided between the sacred and secular stories of God's action or is there a common history which encompasses believers and unbelievers alike? While acknowledging that there is a sense in which Christians live within "two histories", Samuel and Sugden have argued elsewhere that "this dual history is united under the umbrella of the kingdom of God" and history therefore should not be segregated because "God reveals himself in all history" (Samuel, Sugden 1987:134-136).

The result of sharply dividing nature and grace is seen in the ways in which the story of the church is often separated from the story of society. The dualism implicit in such interpretation expresses itself in an a-contextual approach in which the effects of social forces on the life of the church are not sufficiently recognized. This produces a view of church and society which cannot provide an

adequate guide for Christian participation in the social process, and consequently the mission of the church is perceived only in terms of evangelizing individuals and building up the church. Writing of the *History of the Baptist Church in South Africa* written by H.J. Batts in 1920, Louise Kretzschmar has said that

> ...an examination of this work reveals that the emphasis is on the early pastors and the geographical growth of Baptist churches. Significantly, the social context within which the events took place, such as colonialism; the response of the various black tribes to white occupation of their land; the implications of the discovery of diamonds and gold; and the political domination of whites in South Africa, are not discussed. It is assumed that the task of the young Baptist church was simply to evangelise and establish churches - mainly among the white inhabitants (1990:25).

I suggest that there is a close connection between the nature-grace division we have been discussing and the evangelical non-involvement in social action which we have repeatedly noted. If it is true that a higher spiritual responsibility demands a prior commitment and that this needs to be isolated as a separable duty in mission, then it follows that social concerns will inevitably be relegated to secondary positions and often neglected. That this is so often the case is not surprising, granted this dualistic way of thinking which predominates among evangelicals. This form of dualism is challenged by the essentially holistic character of the theology of the poor being developed in this thesis.

2.4. Church-World Divide

The holistic understanding which challenges the individualism-dualism of conservative evangelicalism also applies to the ways in which the division between church and world is conceived. There are formulations of this distinction which, I believe, are more products of dualistic patterns of thought than they are of the separation which undoubtedly is required by an evangelical view of the church and salvation. I see similar dynamics at work in this respect to those noted in the nature-grace division. Here also

sharp dichotomies are often introduced which are more reflective of Western patterns of thought than they are of biblical understanding.

2.4.1. Inclusivism and Exclusivism

A fundamental fact concerning evangelicalism is that it affirms that the community of faith, the church, is a company of people distinguishable from other people. This distinction arises from the perception that faith in Christ and the experience of God's grace in salvation are experiences which set Christians apart from other people. This is an affirmation which cannot be denied if evangelical integrity is to be maintained. It needs also to be said, however, that this distinction of the community of faith is understood in different ways among evangelicals and that there are emphases of the separateness of the church from the world which adversely affect the role of the church in society. It is possible, I believe, within the framework of the distinction that has been affirmed, to say that some evangelicals have an exclusive approach to this distinction, strongly emphasizing separateness in an absolutist way, while others take a more inclusive view focussing on the church's participation in society and the importance of our common humanity. While the distinction of the community of faith needs to be upheld as a basic given of evangelical identity, this must be done in a way which provides space for genuine participation in society. For this to take place it is necessary to affirm views of humanity and the action of God in the world in which inclusive rather than exclusive categories predominate. It is this approach which best expresses the holistic nature of a theology of the poor and challenges the dualism which prompts strongly exclusivist formulations.

An example of the exclusive approach is found in a statement by Twycross in which, arguing against confusing the church and the world, he says: "It is to mix what Scripture keeps distinct - God the Creator and God the Redeemer, the God of the cosmos and the God

of the covenant, the world and the church, common grace and saving grace, the reformation of society and the regeneration of man" (Morphew 1989:175). Here there is an endeavour to maintain an essentially two-tier system for understanding the world in which we live. The distinction created by faith in Christ is seen to form a fundamental framework for interpreting reality in terms of division. Where this world view prevails an exclusivist understanding emerges and the influence of this kind of dualism makes it difficult for Christians to participate in pluralist enterprises in other than a triumphalistic way. The key issue I see emerging here is whether the undoubted distinction brought about by Christian faith demands the kind of across-the-board division indicated by Twycross in which separation between church and world becomes a grid for interpreting all reality. I question whether commitment to the community of faith demands this kind of interpretation.

In contrast to the above view I turn to an essay by David Lowes Watson in which he speaks of Christian identity as "election for the world. Christians", he says, "live in the tension of particular faith and global humanity, neither of which can be sacrificed to the other, and both of which constantly threaten the integrity of the church" (1986:117). The church must be true both to the particularity of its faith and to its involvement in the world. But it must never affirm its distinctiveness "at the expense of the rest of the world" (1986:119). In the affirmation of its identity it is its function as a servant of the world which is crucial for "it exists in the world to benefit the rest of humankind" (1986:129). In Watson's argument there is a grappling with the problem of elitism implicit in the concept of election. He addresses this by suggesting that the distinctiveness of the church must be viewed in the larger framework of the whole of humanity.

> There is no dichotomy between sacred and secular, for the sacred is "in the entire edifce, in the big temple we are to construct in history, and not just in the cement that is the little temple". The construction of this big temple requires the momentary segregation of the little temple, just as our existence of love requires a moment of setting ourselves apart from others. But this momentary segregation of the little temple must be done

> in such a way "that it truly forms a cement and leaven, rather than turning into a conventional formalism wherein the would-be salt loses its savor" (1986:128).

The fundamental difference between this view of Watson and the earlier formulation proposed by Twycross lies in the way in which the identity of the church is conceived. For Twycross the church finds itself in relation to its distinctness from the rest of humanity. For Watson it finds its identity as part of the larger whole. It is at this point that I see the divergence between an exclusivist and an inclusivist interpretation of the relationship between church and world. Exclusivism means focus on the fundamental significance of distinction and the formulation of this as the essential cateogory for understanding God's redemptive activity in the world. Inclusivism, on the other hand, means focus on participation in "the big temple" as the category through which the church understands itself. In this understanding God's redemptive activity stretches beyond its confines and instead of being the exclusive *locus* of this activity the church becomes the key participant in that activity which leads towards the renewal of all creation. The segregation of the "little temple" then becomes a momentary necessity whose ultimate purpose is to contribute to the erection of a larger edifice. Differently expressed, it is the establishment of the kingdom rather than the completion of the church which constitutes the ultimate goal of redemptive activity. I suggest that where this form of inclusivist emphasis prevails the church is saved from opting out of society and can be a participant in it with a degree of freedom impossible where notions of exclusivity hamper its operation.

2.4.2. Church Triumphalism

One of the results of the exclusivist view is that it produces an emphasis on the church as end in itself. This fundamentally restricts its view of its mission to one in which its exists to increase itself. Speaking of this view of evangelism which he terms "collective self-centrism" David Bosch has said:

> ...people are brought into the Church with the purpose of being sent out to bring others into the Church, and so on. The Church thus becomes an end in itself. It collects and conserves people for heaven....it becomes an institute of self-preservation which invites people to come in out of the world. It does not itself go into the world except in evangelistic forays during which people are snatched from mortal peril and dragged aboard a lifeboat (1981:58).

Where this self-preserving view exists the church tends to develop a triumphalistic attitude in which its own significance is exalted so that instead of serving as the agent of God's kingdom in the world it becomes itself the great object of God's eternal plan. This is reflected in the emphasis which sees the goal of all history in a glorified church rather than in a renewed creation. This perception affects the way in which God's action in history is understood. For example, in a recent religious broadcast I heard an evangelical preacher say that "God rules the whole world for the benefit of the church".6 Another example of this kind of triumphalistic view of the church is in *Reformation South Africa* where one of the editors writing of the church and history says:

> The Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is the all-important factor, and history is being directed and used by the hand of God so as to ultimately bring the Church to completion and glory. *The Church does not come to an end when history is complete, rather history comes to an end when the Church is complete.* What is God's ultimate concern? It is not South Africa, nor any other country for that matter. It is the Church (Stone 1990:1).

This church-centred view has at least two unhelpful consequences. First, as we have already noted, it discourages social action by its sharp division between sacred and secular history. Second, it devalues the significance of the kingdom by a dualistic form of interpretation in which its present social and holistic meaning is denied. Thus, instead of serving God's purpose as a catalyst leading towards a universal reign of justice and peace, the church replaces the kingdom as the goal of human history. This has the effect of making the extension of the church rather than the extension of the kingdom the central thrust of mission. Or put in an-

other way, this has interpreted the idea of the extension of the kingdom to mean in effect the expansion of the church and tied the idea of mission to a kind of ecclesiastical self-perpetuation beyond which no frontiers exist. The effects of this sort of approach have been well described by Howard Snyder in contrasting "Kingdom people" with "Church people".

> Kingdom people seek first the Kingdom of God and its justice; church people often put church work above concerns of justice, mercy and truth. Church people think about how to get people into the church; Kingdom people think about how to get the church into the world. Church people worry that the world might change the church; Kingdom people work to see the church change the world.
>
> When Christians put the church ahead of the Kingdom, they settle for the status quo and their own kind of people. When they catch a vision of the Kingdom of God, their sights shift to the poor, the orphan, the widow, the refugee, "the wretched of the earth," and to God's future. They see the life and work of the church from the perspective of the Kingdom (1983:11).

When a kingdom-centred approach replaces a church-centred approach the result is a denial of triumphalism (come to us for we have the answers), and an affirmation of the servant model (we offer that gift we believe God has given us for the good of humankind). In this approach, in the words of Paget-Wilkes, the church acts as "sign-bearer".

> The major task of the church, the Christian corporate body, is to be a signbearer to humanity, showing the way towards total humanisation, and the new Kingdom.
>
> However important the church may be, it is not an end in itself but a means by which God's original plan for his creation can be recovered. Salvation is concerned, not with the church as such, but with the fulfillment of God's overall design.
>
> At present, the church is so sadly lacking in the qualities of real salvation, that it can hardly be described as a signbearer to the Kingdom. (Maybe that is why some have looked elsewhere for more effective signs of the Kingdom and of salvation). But even so, these are what the church ought to exhibit, here is the way of life it should follow if it is to be true to its Founder. "What difference it would make it (sic) national churches, local congregations...instead of producing lopsided

> congregations subjugated to the status quo and engaged in the proclamation of salvation as a ticket to heaven, would plant liberated communities of believers who relate the claims and demands of the more just humane society" (1981: 142).

2.4.3. Christian Identity and the Identity of the Poor

In thinking of the ways in which dualistic thinking distorts the relationship between church and world we have noted the effects of exclusivism revealed in a triumphalistic way of thinking of the church. Nevertheless, as we have seen, the church still has a particular identity which distinguishes it. At an earlier stage in this thesis we considered the identity of the poor and saw a form of particularism expressed there as well. This raises the question concerning the relationship between these two particularisms. How can the poor be, in a sense, a "chosen people" if this is the prerogative of the church? Does the affirmation of God's preferential option for the poor not contradict the special distinctiveness of the church? Does an emphasis on the poor not lead to a neglect of the special nature of the church and vice versa?

In addressing this problem I suggest that there are certain themes developed in this thesis which help us to hold these two particularisms in tension and see them as complementary rather than contradictory.

(1) In the view of God advanced in this theology of the poor the emphasis has been placed on participatory rather than magisterial models of understanding. This has implications for the way in which we see the concept of the choice of either the poor or the church. We noted that an option for the poor was preferential in the sense that it did not exclude the non-poor from being loved by God, rather this particularism was seen as a means to an end, a point of departure for a universal love. In the same way we may say that the distinctive character of the church as those who enter a relationship of love to God is not to be seen as an end in it-

self. It also is a point of departure for a broader concept of love, not only in terms of sharing God's love with individuals through a call to personal conversion, but also in the affirmation of God's participatory suffering in identification with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the unclothed, the sick, and the prisoner (Matthew 25:31-46). I suggest that if the experience of God's love is cherished by Christians in an exclusive way, then the meaning of that love in the depth of its extension to human misery is lost and the participatory vision of God forfeited for a magisterial model less able to reflect the reality of divine love. By focus on the participatory model we are able to affirm God's loving identification both with believers and the poor in complementary terms which do not deny the special character of either.

(2) The understanding of the kingdom of God reflected in these discussions also helps to hold these two particularisms together. Because this kingdom perspective affirms that Christians act as agents of the reign of God in the world and also that the poor are both special objects and subjects of the gospel, it creates a bridge between these two particularisms. In different ways both the church and the poor serve to advance the cause of the kingdom. The denial of exclusivism opens the way to hold these two concepts together in a dialectic which enhances both the church and the poor as servants of the kingdom. It is in advancing the kingdom that both the church and the poor fulfill a humanizing role in the world.

(3) By its holistic emphasis this theology also holds the concept of the church and the poor together. Speaking in holistic terms creates the potential for a helpful relationship between the community of the poor and the community of faith. While it does not make them synonymous categories it does suggest compatibility of meaning (the church of the poor). By relatedness to poverty the church enhances its capacity to serve in the world. By relatedness to the distinctiveness of faith the poor serve to witness against the total secularizti0n of society. In thinking holistically we can hold the special nature of the church and the poor together.

The dualism which dismisses either because of alleged incompatibility needs to be rejected. I suggest that an emphasis on the poor need not be threatening to the particularity of the community of faith nor vice versa. It is only when particularism becomes exclusivism that barriers are erected between the two concepts. This suggests that a holistic theology of the poor is certainly not incompatible with an evangelical view of the church. On the contrary, it serves to liberate this ecclesiology from harmful exclusivism and triumphalism and set it free for the service of God's universal kingdom.

The holistic nature of the theology of the poor has in this section been seen as a challenge to the individualism and dualism of the conservative evangelical community. It is significant to note the ways in which an overemphasis on separation and division creates an incapacity among evangelicals to relate meaningfully to society. This highlights the need for a theology of the poor which in its holistic character can set evangelicals free to serve the world without dualistic inhibitions hampering such service. This theology can serve as a powerful instrument in the removal of the barriers erected by individualism-dualism which impede the quest for a more humane society. Writing of the church as God's agent Paget Wilkes has said:

> It must realise that any form of dualist understanding of a "holy" area, and a "profane" area within humanity, is an insult to God's overall power and purpose. For God is at work throughout his creation, working for the ultimate fulfillment of the Kingdom inaugurated by Christ, and the total humanisation of man. That is the purpose of God's creation (1981:138).

3. Holistic Gospel: An Evangelical Alternative

In the previous main section a theology of the poor in its holistic character has been seen as a challenge to individualism and dualism. At this point it is necessary to spell out an alternative to the interpretation which has been seen to be inadequate. In

this section it is a holistic understanding of the gospel which is proposed as a more adequate formulation.

3.1. Holistic Alternative

3.1.1. Evangelical Holistic Tradition

Orlando Costas has written that "The crucial problem in mission today is whether ... we can repossess earnestly and urgently the biblical vision of a holistic mission" (1979:xii). Central to holistic mission is its perception of the gospel which it seeks to make known. I suggest that if this gospel message is to be effective it must, in contrast to reductionist versions in which it has appeared in individualistic-dualistic forms, be itself a message which displays a holistic character.

The ways in which the mainline evangelical community have failed to adequately reflect this gospel characteristic have already been emphasized. Because non-holistic ways of understanding have become so common place among evangelicals it often happens that holistic formulations are met with suspicion of being departures from evangelical faith. It needs to be affirmed however, that as in the case of a theology of the poor, so in this aspect there is a holistic evangelical tradition from which the modern evangelical community in general has moved.

One example of this holistic gospel emphasis is seen in the nineteenth century revivalist movement in America in which the issue of slavery formed a focus for attention. In contrast to later dualistic emphases and the status quo theology of Princeton Calvinists, the revivalists, despite being hampered by inclinations to individualism, showed a refreshing tendency to apply the gospel to the whole of life.

Timothy Smith quotes Gilbert Haven, a Boston abolitionist and later a Methodist bishop who in 1863 warned of the grave dangers involved

in discouraging ministers from speaking out on political and social affairs. "The Gospel...is not confined to a repentance and faith that have no connection with social or civil duties. The Evangel of Christ is an all-embracing theme. It is the vital force in earth and in heaven" (1976:36). Frenchman Agenor de Gasparin visiting America at the time of the 1858 revival declared: "The great moral force which is struggling with American slavery is the Gospel"; while the editor of an antislavery missionary magazine wrote: "God will secure the deliverance of the oppressed. Our work is to promote it by the pure Gospel of Christ, with its faithful application to all sin, and emphatically, to the great enormities of slavery" (Smith 1976:215).

Dayton also mentions this emphasis, particularly with reference to the preaching of Luther Lee, a Methodist minister active in the antislavery struggle. In the early 1840s Lee joined Orange Scott in the founding of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, but returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church after the Civil War. He published several volumes of sermons *The Evangelical Pulpit 1854-1864* which in the words of Dayton "provide an insight into Wesleyan preaching in an era when the social gospel was still a part of Evangelicalism" (1976:80). Lee argued that the reformation of evils involved entering the political arena for "a large portion of the evils are connected with civil government, and the gospel will never remove them, until it is so preached as to have something to do with politics" (1976:80-81). This is certainly a far cry from later evangelical assertions that the gospel has nothing to do with politics.

At the heart of such preaching was the conviction that the gospel was a message intended to reform society, so results of gospel preaching were looked for in this regard as well as that of spiritual conversion and awakening. In fact, distinctions between so-called spiritual and social concerns do not appear to be emphasised at all in this kind of revivalist preaching and writing, there seems to be a refreshing lack of, or even awareness of, this kind of dualism. A natural assumption appears to be that the

moving of the Holy Spirit in individuals should be accompanied by increased and more effective moves for social reform. The blending of spiritual and social aspects of the gospel, both in emphasis and impact, is reflected in the following quote from Smith:

> If Finney, the Tappans, and abolitionists like Theodore Dwight Weld and Wesleyan Methodist Orange Scott were not radical enough for some of the young historians of the late 1960s, they seemed revolutionary firebrands indeed to their own generation. The spiritual quest of inward or "entire" sanctification at Oberlin touched its high-water mark in 1839, the same year the cry for social justice reached flood tide there. While Finney was writing the lectures on sanctification which were published serially that year in the new periodical, the *Oberlin Evangelist* the community attacked not only slavery, but also the racism expressed in Ohio laws concerning black people. Local leaders denounced male exploitation of women and the exclusion of females from higher education and the ministry, and they pled for an end to Christian connivance with warfare waged for nationalistic, economic or expansionist purposes (Smith 1976:252).

3.1.2. Necessary Alternative

In contrast to the tradition just mentioned the gospel has often come to be misused by modern evangelicals as an ideological weapon to entrench the status quo and oppress powerless people. This certainly is the case in South Africa where commitment to the gospel is generally seen by evangelicals in terms that exclude political liberation and the struggle for justice.

Speaking concerning the prostitution of evangelization in America Orlando Costas has said:

> The problem with many of the activities that today pass for evangelization is that they fail to meet the test of the cross. The gospel they proclaim has been made such a marketable message - offering a plastic Jesus and an inoffensive call to a terrific, happy life that guarantees an unending good time - that it has become unrecognizable. The churches and groups that advocate such evangelization appear to be carbon copies of the consumer society. It is difficult to differentiate them from sophisticated social clubs, cultural associations, and businesses that specialize in providing a variety of re-

> ligiously oriented services. Indeed, one of the most serious problems facing the community of faith today (at least in the Americas) is that evangelization has become so popular with people in the mainstream that it has turned out to be a powerful ideological weapon in the hands of those who are more interested in maintaining their social, economic and cultural privileges than in responding affirmatively to those who are on the bottom of society - namely, the poor, the powerless, and the oppressed. When people claim to be born of the Spirit and then icily continue to turn their backs on the outcast and disenfranchised, then it is time for us to ask whether they have been born of the Spirit of the crucified Christ or born of the spirit of the Antichrist. When churches report phenomenal numerical growth as a result of their evangelistic endeavors and then continue to sacralize the status quo, failing to demonstrate a qualitatively distinct style of life and obstructing the transformation of the social, economic, cultural, and political institutions of society, then we have every right to question the evangelistic performance of such churches and ask whether they are being faithful to the message of the cross (1989:81-82).

These words of Costas are not, in my view, an exaggeration of the evangelical crisis. Though referring primarily to the Americas, they apply also to South Africa where the norms of American multinational consumerism are avidly promoted and closely allied in outlook and practise with evangelization. It is this situation particularly which calls for a reformulation of the popular gospel. This of necessity will involve detaching it from its false associations and joining it to its true context, the biblical kingdom in which it is specially linked with the situation of the poor and oppressed.

3.1.3. Understanding the Gospel

In previous discussions the theme of the gospel has been referred to on various occasions as this theology of the poor was being developed. Some of the main aspects which have been mentioned thus far may be expressed as follows.

(1) The gospel is defined by what it means to the poor who may be considered a lens through which its meaning is communicated.

(2) To properly understand the gospel it must be seen as the good news of God's kingdom which is distinguished by the fact that it gives hope to the oppressed-poor of society.

(3) To gain a true understanding of the gospel it is necessary to see it as dependent on the life of Jesus of Nazareth who in his earthly context was committed to the cause of the poor.

(4) It has been suggested that a neglect of the gospel's connection to the poor results in the proclamation of an a-contextual message which has no liberating impact in the social sphere.

In this present chapter the emphasis is on the holistic character of the gospel. The statement which I see as epitomizing this holistic nature and best representing the insights of radical evangelicals is taken from the Radical Discipleship Statement issued at Lausanne 1974.7

> We affirm that ...The *evangel* is God's Good News in Jesus Christ; it is Good News of the reign he proclaimed and embodies; of God's mission of love to restore the world to wholeness through the cross of Christ and him alone; of his victory over the demonic powers of destruction and death; of his Lordship over the entire universe; it is good news of a new creation, a new humanity, a new birth through him by his life-giving Spirit; of the gifts of the messianic reign contained in Jesus and mediated through him by his Spirit; of the charismatic community empowered to embody his reign of shalom here and now before the whole creation and make his Good News seen and known. It is Good News of liberation, of restoration, of wholeness, and of salvation that is personal, social, global and cosmic. Jesus is Lord! Alleluia Let the earth hear his voice (Padilla, Sugden 1985a:8).

This is a statement born out of a conference situation as a response to the perceived inadequacies of the dominant evangelical approach. Although it does not specifically refer to the poor, its focus on God's kingdom leaves room for this emphasis. Certainly, its formulation was prompted by concerns which largely emerged from third world situations of poverty and oppression. The Statement

also needs to be seen as an initial response at a time when change to contextual and holistic ways of thinking was still to gain full momentum. It nevertheless represents a strongly holistic emphasis, particularly in its concluding formulation of the nature of the good news. Seen against the background of the mainline evangelical understanding of the time it constitutes a break with traditional thinking and formulation while holding to the essence of the evangelical position.

In the understanding of the gospel developing within this thesis I offer the following formulation. This is an attempt to identify and explicate in a brief statement the essence of the good news as I see it needs to be proclaimed and lived in South Africa today. It endeavours to maintain an essentially evangelical commitment yet at the same time to challenge evangelicalism's perceived inadequacies with a reformulation reflective of a holistic view.

The gospel is God's good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. It relates to people in their life situations and is understood in the light of these situations. It is good news of the coming of Jesus Christ into this world in which God has provided hope for the poor by his identification with their plight and with their cause. It announces God's love for all people demonstrated in his suffering participation in the human situation. It is a message of God's kingdom inaugurated in Jesus, now present in the life of the church and the world, and to be consummated at the return of Christ. This kingdom is God's new order for all of human life which contradicts all systems which dehumanize people and calls for commitment to the cause of those so dehumanized and oppressed. It is a message which tells of what God has done in Jesus Christ, his birth, life, death and resurrection, in which sin, death, and all evil powers are overcome; and of his continuing action to bring healing and liberation both to individuals and society. Through God's action in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit people are reconciled to God and to each other, individuals experience the wholeness of a renewed humanity, oppressive social structures are challenged and a liberating hope for society provided, and the renewal of the whole

created order is promised. The gospel issues a call to a new way of life through faith in Jesus Christ, to a new community of faith (the exemplification of God's new order), and to a new more humane society, to be pursued through commitment to justice and peace in our world.

3.2. Integral Relationship

In chapter four I remarked that one reason for evangelicalism's inadequate social theology lay in the tendency to make justice concerns an addition to, rather than a central part of its gospel message. The hesitancy among evangelicals to unambiguously affirm an integration between spiritual and social components of one gospel message is revealed in the debate concerning the relationship between evangelism and social responsibility.

In June 1982 there was a gathering of fifty evangelical leaders in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for a Consultation on the Relationship between Evangelism and Social Responsibility (CRESR). In the Commitment issued by this Consultation it is acknowledged that one of the reasons why many evangelicals in the twentieth century have lacked a social conscience has been because of "the dichotomy which has often developed in our thinking" (*Evangelism and Social Responsibility* 1982:20). In this Commitment there are three kinds of equally valid relationships formulated as expressive of the Consultation's thinking. Social activity is seen as a consequence of evangelism, a bridge to evangelism and a partner in evangelism (1982:21-23) The Commitment is careful not to identify social responsibility with evangelism and, although mentioning that some participants were uncomfortable with the phrase, affirms the position of the Lausanne Covenant that "in the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary" (1982:24-25).

In my view the key issue in this debate is not the question of "priority" or the formulation of a satisfactory "relationship" between evangelism and social action. I see concern with this ques-

tion as reflective of Western ways of thinking where distinctions and contrasts are emphasized and the inter-connectedness of varying dimensions in the whole Christian mission undervalued. I agree with David Bosch that the concern for "prioritising" is a "baleful undertaking" (1988:17). In similar vein Jim Wallis has said that the problem of the relationship between evangelism and social justice is entirely a white problem and does not exist in black churches except where it has been put there by white Christians.8

The key issue here is whether the pursuit of social justice is seen as an essential part of the gospel or as a consequence of the gospel. Is the gospel a whole message encompassing both spiritual and material, personal and social dimensions, or is it an essentially spiritual message (concerning a right relationship with God) which has material and social implications? Writing concerning the "radical discipleship" group which met at Lausanne in 1974 and their unhappiness with part of the Lausanne Covenant Chris Sugden says: "This did not make the point that social responsibility was more than an implication of the gospel; it was an intrinsic part of the expression of the good news itself" (1989:33).

In similar vein Peter Lee highlights this issue in the following words.

> I owe the basis of my own Christian learning to evangelical circles....For the best reasons my mentors believed that social benefits were *by-products* of the gospel - good, necessary, valuable, even required by God - but by-products all the same. I no longer believe that, simply on the good evangelical ground that it is not a biblical view; for me the social implications are of the *essence* of the faith, and I cannot un-believe that without re-writing the great commandment on which hang all the law and the prophets so dearly loved of my teachers. The corporate social aspect is a constitutive part of God's plan of salvation (1986:150).

Lee has referred to the efforts of John Stott to relate evangelism and social concern in such a way that the need for social action can be strongly asserted as a part of Christian mission itself. Yet at the same time he speaks of the two as separable entities ex-

isting in a partnership or marriage. Stott in this, says Lee, represents a position not reached by many evangelicals in the development of their social thinking.

> In the maelstrom of discussion after Lausanne and Pattaya Dr Stott has also moved on, linking up at one point with a view which prefers to speak of a marriage between evangelism and social action rather than a partnership - an image of closer union than the latter. The positions continue to be formulated. In a way Lausanne was thinking of two boiled eggs in adjacent egg cups, and the "marriage" thinking envisages two fried eggs in a pan with their whites mingling and their egg yokes remaining intact. I suspect the Bible teaches an omelette (1986:167-168).

This project's theology of the poor expresses a holistic perspective which sees a union of spiritual and material, personal and social aspects without too much concern about spelling out the exact ways in which they mix, even though I find Lee's idea of the omelette attractive. What matters here however, is not the precise formulation of the relationship, but a commitment to the whole gospel in a way which guards its integrity as one message from which material and social dimensions cannot be omitted without reduction of the gospel itself. I see this concern as an extension of a theology in which the poor are of central significance.

3.3. Salvation: Social as well as Personal

In the affirmation of a holistic gospel the issue of salvation arises. A basic factor influencing evangelicals in their separation of evangelism from social responsibility is the conviction that salvation must be thought of only in personal terms and not in social or political terms. This distinction is expressed in the words of the Lausanne Covenant: "Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty" (Lausanne Covenant 1975:4-5).

3.3.1. Restricted Evangelical Understanding

The understanding of conservative evangelicals can be described as one in which the idea of salvation is restricted to personal and spiritual (except as it relates to a future resurrection) categories. From this perspective, to speak of salvation in social, political or material terms is to speak in an unbiblical way. This restriction is often thought of as one of the factors which distinguishes evangelicals from non-evangelicals who are seen to use the term salvation in too loose and broad a way, thereby obscuring the all important need for lost sinners to come to find God's saving grace and receive the gift of eternal life. Because the heart of God's plan is the salvation of lost sinners in their justification, sanctification and ultimate glorification, and their incorporation into Christ's body the church, any movement beyond the personal-spiritual emphasis is seen as a threat to the evangelistic mission of the church and a denial of the gospel.

I see an example of this restriction among conservative evangelicals in the response of the Baptist Union of South Africa to the *Message to the People of South Africa* published by the SACC in August 1968.9 The Baptist Union issued a reply to the *Message* in which it was rejected as a questionable theological document which "confused man's eternal salvation with the salvation of political issues" (de Gruchy 1979:120). At the heart of this rejection lay the issue of how salvation is understood. The Baptist Union alleged that the *Message* confused the distinction between the church and the world by its use of the concept of salvation in a wrong way. "The authors appear to confuse national survival with personal salvation which is the state of being in a right relationship with God through Christ" (de Gruchy, 1968:39). This is a highly significant statement because it indicates the conviction that salvation must only be perceived in personal terms. The critique of the *Message* was based on an understanding of its terminology in the light of this presupposed restriction (salvation cannot apply to

social structures because these cannot enter a relationship of being right with God).

The same inclination to judge the *Message* from the supposed restriction of salvation to personal categories is seen in the editorial of the *South African Baptist* of November 1968. "Although not explicitly stated, it would appear that in the opinion of the Commission, the *whole human race* is in the process of being reconciled to God, i.e. of becoming Christian" (Politics and the Gospel 1968:12). The basis of this misinterpretation of the *Message* is a strong attachment to a restricted view of salvation which excludes the possibility that it can be thought of in anything but personal categories. Thus later, in objecting to the statement that South Africa is under the judgment of God because of its racial policies, the editorial says:

> This too, is essentially a personal matter. God, in this age of Grace, deals primarily with individuals and, in this matter of salvation, nothing, but nothing, can take the place of a restored personal relationship to Him through an individual commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. To this, the heart of the Gospel, all other issues are secondary (Politics and the Gospel 1968:13).

Thus, a broader application of the concept of salvation, is seen as a replacement of the solely individual reference of the term and a threat to the "heart of the gospel".

The restriction of the idea of salvation in this fashion is, as earlier noted, often conceived as an essential of evangelical identity. In a chapter on "Good Doctrine" written by me in 1976 in a Baptist publication, this restrictive use of the term salvation is identified as one of the distinctives which characterize evangelicals. Writing of the primary mission of the church as evangelistic, I refer to the assessment of Peter Beyerhaus concerning the Lausanne Congress that

> ...contrasts the difference between the evangelical and ecumenical understanding of social and political duty by speaking of the gap between Geneva and Lausanne. The Geneva approach ...is that salvation is social action....It may also have its personal aspect, but, none-

> theless, reconciliation brought about between men by Christian action is itself salvation. While, says Beyerhaus, evangelicals regard evangelism and social action as both part of the Christian duty, they cannot identify social action with salvation (Walker 1976:30-31).

The basic understanding from which I wrote at that time was that the concept of salvation was restricted by biblical teaching to the personal, spiritual sphere and that this perspective distinguished evangelicals from non-evangelicals. This is a view which I now believe cannot be sustained. This perspective reflects not the essence of evangelicalism but a Western dualistic interpretation in which personal and social concerns are divorced. As we shall see, it is a view which is being questioned by radical evangelicals.

3.3.2. Holistic Evangelical Understanding

John Howard Yoder has written:

> The restriction of the term *gospel* and of the meaning of *evangelism* to an invitation addressed to individuals is deeply rooted in contemporary American English usage, but is not biblical. It is not the case that a witness to an individual, calling him to conversion with reference to his own personal guilt and the direction of his life, is biblically speaking evangelism whereas the witness either to groups or to persons in social responsibility, calling on them to change their dispositions and do in their offices what God would have them do is something else. We may look at the meaning of the *euangellion* in secular Greek, or at the message, "the kingdom of God has come near!" proclaimed in turn by John the Baptist, by Jesus, by his seventy messengers, and by the church at Pentecost; or we could compare the counterparts of this message in Old Testament prophecy. In each case it is clear that the good news announced to the world has to do with the reign of God among men in all their interpersonal relations, and not solely with the forgiveness of sins or the regeneration of individuals (1964:23).

This holistic interpretation of "gospel" and "evangelism" points to a view of salvation which crosses the personal-spiritual frontiers of conservative evangelicals. It indicates that the message of

salvation is one which cannot be divorced from the biblical proclamation of the kingdom of God. God's reign and his redemptive activity are not to be separated but united in the concept of a salvation in which God acts to overthrow the powers of evil whether this takes place in the experience of individuals or in the history of a community.

This kingdom perspective is shown particularly in the holistic view of salvation contained in the "contextual evangelization" of Orlando Costas. We have already noted his emphasis on "evangelization from the periphery" with its view of the liberative effects of a holistic gospel for oppressed people. Intrinsic to such proclamation from the situation of powerless people is the concept of the gospel as a message which addresses the whole human situation, not only its spiritual dimension. "Contextual evangelization", says Costas, "is a holistic witness to God's liberating grace in a given sociohistorical situation" (1989:33). He goes on to speak of a particular model of such evangelization in Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah chapters 40-55), the "evangelizing prophet" (1989:33).

The key text of this "theology of evangelization" is Isaiah 52:7:

> How beautiful upon the mountains
> are the feet of him who brings good tidings,
> who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good,
> who publishes salvation,
> who says to Zion, "Your God reigns".

It is this text which is quoted by Paul in Romans 10:15 where he describes the task of those sent to evangelize. In Acts 10:36 the same image is used for the evangelizing ministry of Jesus and the apostles. "Isaiah 52:7 is therefore a foundational text for the New Testament, for the work of the New Testament evangelist is patterned after Deutero-Isaiah's description of the divine herald, who brings glad tidings of peace, proclaims salvation, and declares that God reigns" (Costas 1989:34).

This evangelization spoken of by the prophet is centred in Zion, that is Jerusalem. Here, evangelization is the announcement to the Babylonian captives, the oppressed of that day, that God reigns and that he comes to them with power (Isaiah 40:9-11). From this Mount Zion the good news of God's reign will be announced to the towns of Judah (1989:34-35).

In the argument of the prophet one of the ways in which God comes with power to the people is through Cyrus, the Persian king who by conquering Babylon initiates the return of the captives (Isaiah 41:2). Although he has not acknowledged God (Isaiah 45:4-5), he is chosen as God's instrument to liberate the captives of Judah and give them peace. "Thus it is through a historical and political event that the peace and salvation which are to be proclaimed from Zion begin to be accomplished" (1989:35).

Costas notes how in this crucial context evangelization is a collective and historical announcement of peace and salvation through which God's sovereign presence throughout the land is announced. The peace (*shalom*) refers to

> ...social well-being, productivity, creativity, and harmonious relations with neighbor and the environment. This is made possible by a just ordering of life, which guarantees that the weak and oppressed shall be lifted up and put alongside the strong and mighty. Similarly, *salvation* means liberation from captivity and restoration of that which has been destroyed; it means straightening the crooked ways, leveling the uneven ground, and making plain the rough places (Isa. 40:4). In short, it means holistic reconciliation - with God, the neighbour, and the land (1989:35).

This is, I believe, important Old Testment material relating to the concept of salvation because it shows how in a foundational passage salvation is thought of in social and political terms and how it is linked to ideas of divine *shalom* and God's reign. Of significance also, is the way in which this is specially applicable to oppressed people, the Babylonian captives referred to as

> ...a people plundered and looted,

> all of them trapped in pits
> or hidden away in prisons.
> They have become plunder
> with no one to rescue them;
> they have been made loot,
> with no one to say, "Send them back" (Isa. 42:22).

In another work Costas argues for a holistic understanding of salvation in dialogue with Carl Henry. He contends that Henry has no other way of explaining God's action in history except in traditional dualistic terms which divide God's action in providence and redemption. In Henry's position, he says, there is no adequate explanation of the relationship between creation and the new creation.

> Henry isolates the history of salvation from secular history. He relates the saving power of the gospel to personal life and afterlife, or to the life and mission of the church and the final consummation of the kingdom, while leaving the affairs of secular history and the nations to God's providence and judgment (1982:40-41).

In contrast to this, Costas says:

> It is my contention that God in Christ not only saved the church from sin and death, but has promised to save the world from corruption and decay; that history, in spite of all its contradicitions and failures, is being moved by the Holy Spirit toward the final consummation of God's kingdom; and that the church is not only the firstfruits of the new creation, but a witness to its final fulfillment and historical anticipations. Therefore the Church should not spare any opportunity to discern the presence of the kingdom in history and interpret its signs to the world in the light of biblical revelation (1982:40).

Costas here presents a clearly holistic perspective in which the concept of salvation is not segregated from that of creation as a totally different category of God's action. Rather, God's promise of salvation applies to the world as well as the church. It has a present historical reference which, though partial, and provisional, is nevertheless real. The expectation of eschatological fulfillment is not allowed in this holistic paradigm to restrict salvation to personal-spiritual categories.

Another example of a holistic understanding of salvation is seen in the theology of Vinay Samuel. Chris Sugden has written that Samuel views God's redeeming action as something which cannot be limited to individuals or the church (1988:355). In his case against such restriction there are three arguments which I see Samuel as using.

(1) By restricting God's work to the redemption of individuals an inconsistency in God is implied.10 If the work of God on the cross is restricted to the victory over evil in the lives of individuals then the category of the individual becomes

> ...a defining category for the doctrine of God. For God's action in Christ is limited to where it is consciously acknowledged by individuals. Where it is not he acts in providence in a different fashion from how he works in Christ. This position generates an inconsistency in the Godhead: that in some relationships God acts in a Christ-shaped way and in others in a way unrelated to Christ (1988:355).

(2) Samuel also argues that if in providence God acts to overcome evil in ways that have no relation to Christ, then this is a reduction of the New Testament concept of Christ (1988: 356). Sugden writes:

> Samuel argues that God's work in salvation (centred on and achieved by Christ's death on the cross) is not limited to achieving victory over evil located only in individuals or to a spiritual realm. This is an argument he adduces from Paul. "Paul does not limit the scope of Christ's death only to a spiritual inner realm, or to personal change. In Col. 1:15-20 he makes it clear that 'God made peace through his Son's death on the cross and so brought back to himself all things, both on earth and in heaven'. In Col. 2:14-15 he says that on the cross, Christ 'disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him'. In Paul's thought these powers are demonic forces behind structures in society such as the state and the Jewish religion. Christ triumphed over their rebellion against God on the cross and is sovereign over them. He is continually disarming them by overcoming the injustice in society created by their rebellion. This work is not necessarily exercised only by the church. Whenever justice replaces injustice Christ's victory on the cross is having its effect" (1988:356).

(3) In a further argument against restricting God's work to the redemption of individuals Samuel sees a problem in confining Christ's work to where he is consciously experienced. This perspective limits divine action by the category of personal experience (1988:358-359). In E.D.Cook's phrase, the phenomenon of "the occasional Christ" is produced:

> ...we have to set up as many opportunities to experience him as possible so that he can be at work as much as possible. These opportunities to experience him appear to be described according to spiritual and individual criteria. These criteria then set the agenda for a programme of activity (1988:359).

In these arguments there is a rejection of the individualism and dualism of conservative evangelicalism. Dualism is opposed because it is seen as dividing God's providential-redemptive activity in a way that produces a split image unworthy of him. It is also rejected because by restricting Christ's influence to the church it qualifies and lessens his universal significance and ignores important strands of biblical teaching. Individualism is opposed because by making conscious experience a criterion for God's redemptive action, God comes to be limited by the parameters of individual human experience. His kingdom reign is then boxed in to a succession of personal spiritual experiences and its relevance to communal, social and material dimensions of life lost.

In the restriction of the concept of salvation to personal and spiritual concerns a form of exclusivism operates which shrinks the vision of God from the universal perspective expressed in the kingdom concept.11 This form of reduction is, in my view, incompatible with the holistic understanding expressed in this thesis' theology of the poor. These observations clearly support a view in which the concept of salvation must be understood in categories which are material, social and political as well as personal and spiritual. They also imply that distinctions between these dimensions should not be allowed to fracture the wholeness of God's redemptive action in the world by concepts which reflect certain aspects operating in isolation from others. In the God of unity revealed through an in-

carnational participation in human life a wholeness of perspective is presented which provides an alternative to the fragmenting effects of individualism-dualism.

NOTES

1 Scottsville Baptist Church, Pietermaritzburg, 23 October 1988.

2 William Barclay has criticized Luther's two-kingdom view as implying this division of responsibility. He says, "His teaching leaves the impression that in the secular realm the government is supreme, and that from it, and not from Christ, the Christian must take his duty" (1971:183-188).

3 The effects of missionaries acting as agents of Western governments and their oppressive impact on indigenous peoples has been documented in *The Missionaries: God against the Indians*, by Norman Lewis (Lewis 1989). Although this work presents a picture in which only the dark side of the missionary enterprise is reflected and shows little recognition of the great social benefit which missions have provided, it is nevertheless a serious treatment based on extensive research and needs to be taken very seriously.

4 The Lausanne Covenant is the statement issued by the International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974.

5 The other themes they propose are: "God at work in law and promise"; "God at work in judgment and grace"; "Judgment and grace in society"; "The image of God"; "The principalities and powers"; "The groaning of creation"; and "The goal is the church" (Sider 1981:52-60).

6 B.Staples, television broadcast from Bethany Emmanuel Baptist Church, Kingwilliamstown, 8 July 1990.

7 "During the Lausanne Congress a number of participants felt strongly that a stronger statement on the nature of evangelism needed to be issued. They drew up the Statement on Radical Discipleship. This was not an official document, but was welcomed by those responsible for drafting the Lausanne Covenant as an addendum to the Covenant" (Padilla, Sugden 1985a:7).

8 A statement made at a meeting in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, on 12 April 1988.

9 The *Message* which was sent to all clergy, English and Afrikaans, throughout South Africa, constituted a challenge to apartheid which was seen as a false gospel (de Gruchy 1979:118-120).

10 In this thesis no attempt is made to discuss various theories of the atonement. In my view no one theory on its own adequately accounts for God's saving action in Christ. While I believe that it is through the cross of Christ that salvation comes to in-

divduals, I agree with Samuel that the effect of the atonement does not stop there. It also has reference to the renewal of society.

11 The universalism of the kingdom and the concept of salvation operating beyond the church raises questions about the particularity of the salvation experienced by Christian believers, the uniqueness of Christ, and the relationship of the Christian faith to other faiths. I believe that evangelicals need to be more fully aware of the real problems presented by the distinctiveness affirmed in their faith. This undoubtedly implies a degree of exclusion which I think cannot be denied. This must be owned with the honest acknowledgement that evangelical understanding by its commitment to the uniqueness of Christ cannot be pluralist in the sense of affirming the co-equality of all faiths as alternative ways to God without reference to Christ. There is a difficult-to-cope-with tension between Christian identity as affirmation of a distinctive community of faith (which therefore excludes those who do not share the Christian faith), and the identification of this community as finding its meaning in the larger context of the worldwide family. I suggest, without claiming a solution to the dilemma, that an inclusivist approach as proposed in this thesis may be seen to have the following positive effects. It encourages a pluralist sensitivity in a way lacking within the more rigid conservative approach. This appears in the difference in emphasis between the Stuttgart Statement and the Manilla Manifesto on the relationship between Christian faith and other faiths (see chapter three). In my view this inclusivist approach also implies the possibility of personal salvation outside of conscious response to the gospel. If, as agreed I suppose by most evangelicals, those dying in infancy and those mentally retarded are not by their incapacity to make a personal response excluded from salvation, then it follows that in principle Christ's saving presence may be known by those not making a conscious response to the gospel or those included in the Christian community. I see this kind of inclusivist affirmation of Christ's uniqueness as a bridge which helps to span the gulf between Christians and those of other faiths. It proposes a view of mission in which it is not Christianity which is propagated, but Christ who is shared. This is done both with the confidence born of the assurance of faith and the experience of grace, and in the humility which comes from recognizing that Christ may well have an identity beyond that reflected in Christian formulation and an influence beyond that known in Christian experience. Through this approach a conscious attempt is made to avoid all forms of triumphalism.

CONCLUSIONS

The argument of this thesis has now passed through three major stages. First, the foundational stage in which the definition of radical evangelicalism and the poor was the primary concern. Second, the developmental stage where in historical and theological terms the centrality of the poor for radical evangelicalism was proposed. Third, the concluding stage in which this theology of the poor has been seen as a challenge to conservative evangelical methodology and mission.

What has emerged is a theological perception which is an alternative to commonly accepted norms of evangelical understanding. This alternative formulation reflects what I believe to be the best aspects of the evangelical tradition and discards those elements which in my view are an encumbrance to evangelical relevance, particularly in a South African context. Its orientation is towards those formulations reflective of the concerns emanating from third world contexts in which the experience of oppression is a major factor in shaping theology and missiology.

1. Central Integrating Category

The human reality of the oppressed-poor as a category decisive in theological understanding is the element which integrates the various aspects of this argument into a united whole. It is this concern which is seen to influence the way in which radical evangelicalism is understood, society is perceived, theology is formulated, scripture is interpreted, and mission is practised.

This is an affirmation made against the background of forms of evangelicalism which have exercised oppressive roles in church and society by their adherence to hierachical and authoritarian modes of theology. It is against such evangelical hegemony that this

theology voices a protest. It does so by asserting the privileged position of the people at the bottom and by challenging those elements in evangelicalism which subjugate and exploit these people. Writing in the Natal Witness of the oppressive effects of fundamentalist religion, William Jones has said:

> People at the bottom have been kept there primarily through the beliefs and values they have been socialized into. The wealth of the people at the top has been translated into a power that enables them to control the minds, beliefs, and values of people at the bottom (1990a:9).

Focus on the poor with its implication of service on their behalf and commitment to their cause is, I believe, a most urgent and relevant issue facing the South African evangelical church. This particularly relates to white evangelical Christians in South Africa in whose theology and practice the poor have largely been neglected. David Bosch rightly asks: "Is not the first priority in the white South African church - *all* denominations - to show solidarity with the weak, the marginalised, and the oppressed" (1988:19)? This focus applies also to the church of the poor in South Africa. To them it is a call to shed the shackles of imported theologies which enslave docile recipients, and to discover the liberating power of an evangelical theology in which God is not a visitor in Western guise but an African engaged at grass roots levels in the struggle for Africa's freedom.

2. A Vision of God and a Call to Conversion

In the formulation of a theology of the poor the way in which God is viewed has been emphasized. In particular it is that vision which sees him in participatory rather than magisterial terms which has been commended. This perspective may be summarized in two statements. First, the God of the poor is the God who exercises a preferential option on their behalf and therefore a God best perceived from the vantage point of those non-elite located at the bottom of society. Second, the God of the poor is the God who is

active in this world and whose kingdom relates to that just order in which the poor are liberated from oppression. In this vision God is perceived in terms which accentuate his incarnational action proceeding from the margins of society. This action initiates mission activities which reflect the concerns of marginalized and exploited people.

In this vision of God a call to conversion is implied. It is a call addressed to the church. Because God is often viewed in terms which neglect or even contradict this perspective, the church needs to hear a call to turn from elitist and hierachical views which deny this biblical vision. John de Gruchy has spoken of the way in which evangelism has often been tied in with a triumphalistic understanding of the church. The idea of evangelism however, needs to be reclaimed through an evangelizing of the church itself in which Christians will discover what evangelism is ultimately about.1 This evangelizing of the church (especially the evangelical church), is a prerequisite for it to exercise a holistic evangelistic ministry in the world. Because of the effects of individualism-dualism the evangelical church needs to be converted to the whole gospel and to turn to the God of the poor.

This is the concern expressed in *The Road to Damascus* document.2 In its final chapter entitled "The Call to Conversion" the experience of Saul of Tarsus is used to reflect the need for a conversion from false views of God.

> What was revealed to Saul was that God was not on the side of the religious and political authorities who had killed Jesus. On the contrary, God was on the side of the One who had been crucified as a blasphemer, who had been accused of being possessed by Beelzebub, who had been handed over as a traitor, an agitator, a pretender to the throne of David and a critic of the Temple (Mt 26:62, 65-66; Lk,23:1-2,5,13). On the road to Damascus Saul was faced with this conflict between these two images or beliefs about God. He was struck blind by it. It was his *kairos*. Saul became Paul when he accepted in faith that the true God was in Jesus and that the risen Lord was in the very people whom he had been persecuting.
>
> This *kairos* on the road to Damascus must be taken seriously by all who in the name of God support the per-

> secution of Christians who side with the poor. The call to conversion is loud and clear (1989:19-20).

3. A Humanizing Concern

A factor in the challenge to conservative evangelical theology in this thesis is that it is seen to contain models of understanding which lack a humanizing quality. Strong emphases on themes such as authority, the division between church and world, the absolute nature of doctrinal statements and ethical imperatives, together with strongly exclusivist views concerning who are saved and who are lost, all tend to produce an inflexibility in which upholding certain all important ideas takes precedence over concern for the welfare of people. In such an intrinsically dogmatic framework the laudable urge to uphold truth at all costs can lead to a theology with a distinctly inhumane emphasis. The fact that this is unintentional and sometimes accompanied by very deep concern for individual people does not alter the overall effects of this form of theology. In my estimation the missing element in such rigidly formulated evangelical understanding is the element of humanization.

In the formulation of this theology one of my primary motivations is the issuing of a statement with an intrinsically humane character - a humanizing concern - which will stand as an alternative to the tendencies we have noted. In this understanding of the theology of the poor it is concern for people in their suffering which is perceived as a primary factor for the formulation of Christian understanding. If theology cannot adequately express this concern, then in my estimation it is seriously flawed at a most crucial point. This is why I believe that ultimately theology must be shaped by its attention to the issue of human suffering rather than the issue of human unbelief. The perspective reflected here is one in which humanization is seen to lie at the heart of true Christian experience and cannot be denied without denying the faith itself. Such humanization involves seeing the promotion of human well-being

and contribution to the quality of human existence as prime factors in measuring the authenticity of Christianity. If the credibility of Chrisitan faith cannot be maintained at this point, then I question if it can be maintained at any other point.

A problem with conservative evangelicalism is that in its fear of secular humanism it has often turned away from that humanism which lies at the heart of the Christian gospel. The humanism in view here does not imply autonomy from God, but the reverse. Indeed, it arises from the concept of God's action in history in an incarnation in which humanity is affirmed in the most pronounced way possible. The theology of the poor in this thesis therefore, is unavoidably humanistic. It focuses on humanity in the light of Jesus' identification with the poor and oppressed and in so doing affirms the value of all human life. This affirmation is made because this theology's defence of the weakest is based on the premise that the ultimate evil of oppression is seen in its dehumanizing quality. By exposing the gravity of dehumanization as reflected through the most vulnerable members of society the way is opened for its denial wherever it appears.

In its attempt to formulate a more humane form of evangelical theology this theology of the poor affirms the church's involvement in the life and cause of oppressed people on the grounds that to do otherwise is to deny the human value of these people. Therefore evangelicals must be prepared to leave their sacred compounds and enter the real world of suffering people in incarnational service.

I know of no more appropriate way to conclude this thesis than with the following quotation from Orlando Costas which vividly describes the situation of the world's suffering multitudes and reflects a call for the church to take a preferential option on their behalf.

> ...we live in an era in which the great majority of women, men, and children are the victims of egotistical interests, male chauvinist actions, political hegemonies, and the arms race. Consequently, they suffer malnutrition and physical ailments, inadequate housing and education, unemployment, social marginalization, and political

powerlessness. Many have been thrown into prison, tortured, exiled, or simply assassinated. Their lives are worth little or nothing, caged in social systems and projects that have been designed and manufactured for a few, and imposed by local oligarchies and unscrupulous international power brokers operating in their own economic and political interests.

...these multitudes are not only sinners in need of the gospel but victims of sin. They challenge the people of God to bear witness to God's love by advocating, struggling for, and praying for their social well-being. "If the church would only say to the poor people of the world that they deserve to live, it would be making a powerful evangelistic pronouncement", says Chilean theologian Pablo Richard. By this he means that if the church worldwide would openly criticize and denounce with words and deeds those who oppress and mistreat the multitudes of the world; if the church would affirm the multitudes' right to projects and programs that promote their social, cultural, economic, and political well-being, it would be stating publicly that God is their defender, that those who work against these people are opposed to God and that in the kingdom of God there is space to live in justice and peace. This space is both a *promise* (cf.Isa. 65:17; Rev. 21:1ff.; 22:1-5) and a *reality* that becomes ever more clear and concrete through sociopolitical praxis. The church has the great privilege of participating prophetically in that praxis and discerning the presence of the Spirit in its midst, of opening small but effective spaces of justice and peace through secular agents (Costas 1989:142-143).

NOTES

1 Viewpoint expressed in an address at the annual Congress of PACSA held in Pietermartizburg on 23 June 1990.

2 A document signed by Christians from seven different nations: the Philippines, South Korea, Namibia, South Africa, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. It expresses solidarity with the poor and challenges Christians who side with the oppressors. "What we have in common is not only a situation of violent political conflict, but also the phenomenon of Christians on both sides of the conflict. This is accompanied by the development of a Christian theology that sides with the poor and the oppressed and the development of a Christian theology that sides with the oppressor" (1989:Preamble).

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